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2 **Weathering of ordinary chondrites from Oman: Correlation**
3 **of weathering parameters with ^{14}C terrestrial ages and a**
4 **refined weathering scale**

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7 Florian J. ZURFLUH^{1*}, Beda A. HOFMANN^{1,2}, Edwin GNOS³, Urs EGGENBERGER¹
8 and A. J. Timothy JULLE⁴
9

10 ¹ Institut für Geologie, Universität Bern, Baltzerstrasse 1 + 3, CH-3012 Bern, Switzerland

11 ² Naturhistorisches Museum der Burgergemeinde Bern, Bernastrasse 15, CH-3005 Bern,
12 Switzerland

13 ³ Muséum d'histoire naturelle de la Ville de Genève, 1 Route de Malagnou, CP 6434 CH-
14 1211 Genève 6, Switzerland

15 ⁴ NSF-Arizona AMS Laboratory, The University of Arizona, 1118 East Fourth St., Tucson,
16 Arizona 85721, USA

17 * Corresponding author. E-mail address: zur0flo@gmail.com
18

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24 Weathering parameters of ordinary chondrites from Oman
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Abstract

We have investigated 128 ^{14}C dated ordinary chondrites from Oman for macroscopically visible weathering parameters, for thin section based weathering degrees and for chemical weathering parameters as analyzed with handheld XRF (HHXRF). These 128 ^{14}C dated meteorites show an abundance maximum of terrestrial age at 19.9 ka, with a mean of 21.0 ka and a pronounced lack of samples between 0 and 10 ka. The weathering degree is evaluated in thin section using a refined weathering scale based on the current W0-W6 classification of Wlotzka (1993), with five newly included intermediate steps resulting in a total of nine (formerly six) steps. We find significant correlations between terrestrial ages and several macroscopic weathering parameters. The correlation of various chemical parameters including Sr and Ba with terrestrial age is not very pronounced. The microscopic weathering degree of metal and sulfides with newly added intermediate steps shows the best correlation with ^{14}C terrestrial ages, demonstrating the significance of the newly defined weathering steps. We demonstrate that the observed ^{14}C terrestrial age distribution can be modeled from the abundance of meteorites with different weathering degrees, allowing the evaluation of an age-frequency distribution for the whole meteorite population.

INTRODUCTION

The majority of meteorites available for scientific study are finds, affected to variable degree by terrestrial weathering. Most of these meteorites are recovered from hot deserts where weathering rates are lower than in more humid areas. Several studies have been performed to quantify terrestrial alteration of hot desert meteorites by Mössbauer spectroscopy (Bland et al. 1998), geochemical investigations (Al-Kathiri et al. 2005; Crozaz et al. 2003; Hezel et al. 2011) or iron isotope analyses (Saunier et al. 2010). Many of the applied methods for quantifying the amount of weathering are relatively expensive and time consuming and thus not applicable to large numbers of hot desert meteorites. To obtain weathering information for large collections (hundreds to thousands of samples), in this study we tested several schemes for the assessment of the degree of weathering. A need for relatively simple ways to quantify weathering by several methods was originally proposed by Gooding (1986) due to the large amounts of samples found in Antarctica. These meteorites are classified by a weathering index, using the macroscopically visible degree of rustiness into categories A, B and C (Cassidy 1980). For meteorites with evaporitic deposits a lower-case “e” was proposed (Velbel 1988). This scheme allows a rapid estimation of weathering, but the resulting classification is rather crude. Also, the physical meaning of the weathering categories is not clear (Gooding 1989; Ikeda and Kojima 1991; Losiak and Velbel 2011). When large numbers of meteorites were becoming discovered in hot deserts, classification of the weathering using thin sections was proposed, with scales ranging from A to C (Jull et al. 1990), A to E (Jull et al. 1991) or A to D (Jull et al. 1993). A slight modification was then proposed with weathering grades W0 to W6 (Wlotzka 1993). This system is currently in use for non-Antarctic meteorites. However, the original publication is an abstract containing limited details and several ambiguities. In this study we use a refined weathering scale, which is compatible with Wlotzka (1993), but additionally dividing grades W3 and W4 into three and two subgrades, respectively.

The determination of terrestrial ages is crucial for understanding of accumulation rates and weathering timescales. Meteorites from hot deserts survive shorter time spans than meteorites from Antarctica and can therefore be dated by the use of cosmogenic ^{14}C (e.g., Jull 2006).

Terrestrial age dating of meteorites also allows determining minimum ages of accumulation areas and geomorphological studies. If a large population from an accumulation area is dated, calculation of meteorite flux is possible (Bland et al. 1996; Zolensky et al. 2006). Since meteorites record conditions from the environment, paleoclimatic studies could be performed using meteorites since their pre-terrestrial composition is well-defined by falls and they are found in all areas on Earth (Bland 2006). One of the features recognized is the contamination of hot desert meteorites with terrestrial Sr and Ba (Al-Kathiri et al. 2005; Crozaz et al. 2003; Nazarov et al. 2004a; Saunier et al. 2010; Shih et al. 2002; Stelzner et al. 1999). Initial concentrations in ordinary chondrites are 9 to 11 $\mu\text{g/g}$ Sr and 3 to 5 $\mu\text{g/g}$ Ba (Wasson and Kallemeyn 1988). Even within some decades the concentrations of these elements can increase by a factor of two as observed in samples from the Holbrook 1912 fall collected in 1968 (Gibson and Bogard 1978). Previous studies of meteorites from Oman showed a correlation of weathering features including bulk geochemical parameters with ^{14}C terrestrial ages of meteorites (Al-Kathiri et al. 2005) and the common involvement of highly saline porewaters in the weathering process (Zurfluh et al. 2013). Samples from ancient meteorite showers usually show a wide variation in degree of weathering. Individuals from the large meteorite strewn field JaH 073 in central Oman (terrestrial age 14.4 ka based on ^{10}Be and ^{14}C data of several stones) vary from W2 to W4 (Gnos et al. 2009). Access to many complete individuals of ordinary chondrites from Oman allowed us to perform studies on weathering and contamination including macroscopic, microscopic, environmental and chemical parameters and also to identify patterns that are dependent on local geography or geological situation. In this study, we investigate correlations between weathering parameters and ^{14}C terrestrial ages of ordinary chondrites from Oman.

SAMPLES AND ANALYSES

Ordinary chondrites from Oman

For this study, ordinary chondrites (OC) found in the hot desert of Oman by the Omani-Swiss meteorite search expeditions in the years 2001 to 2010 (Hofmann et al. 2004) were investigated. Some of these meteorites (found 2001 to 2003) were part of earlier research (Al-

Kathiri et al. 2005). Since the present investigation aims to show the variation of weathering and terrestrial ages of a whole meteorite population, samples from large meteorite showers like JaH 073 and JaH 091 also were used. Meteorites are carefully documented in the field including a description of the soil surface. Samples were packed without direct contact in polypropylene bags for transportation. During the unpacking process, gloves were worn to preclude contamination. The adhering soil was removed using pressurized air. Meteorites were cut using isopropanol and standard rectangular or round polished thin sections were prepared from representative parts of the meteorite samples. Usually, thin section chips were taken along profiles from exterior to interior of the meteorite including varnished surfaces. Meteorites usually weather from outside to inside. Larger meteorites often have relatively fresh “cores” and weathered outer parts. Representative parts are supposed to be samples from core and rim. Most of the samples originate from the transition of exposed towards buried areas. They were investigated under optical microscope and electron microscopes (scanning electron microscope, SEM with EDS: Zeiss EVO50 and electron microprobe, EMP: Jeol JX-8200).

Terrestrial age determination

Our first set of measurements included 50 ^{14}C analyses of meteorites selected on the base of weathering grade (Al-Kathiri et al. 2005). The next phase of our study involved 78 samples that were selected using the following criteria: (1) all individual samples found on the Jabin plateau (approximately 21° 0-24'N / 28° 22-26'E) west of the Wahibah sands in the meteorite recovery area Ramlat al Wahibah (RaW), an area underlain by lithified dune sands with a maximum age of about 120 ka (Preusser et al. 2002; Radies et al. 2004); (2) all LL chondrites of the campaigns from 2001 to 2009; and (3) selected samples covering a profile of around 300 km length from the Arabian sea to areas as distant from the sea as possible, including all stages of the modified weathering degree. Meteorites with masses between 200 g and 2000 g were selected. Samples from recognized strewn fields were avoided since average ^{14}C saturation values used for the terrestrial age calculations are only valid for objects <100 to 150 cm in diameter. Exceptions are stones from the above-mentioned, well dated strewn fields JaH 073 and JaH 091. Large stony meteoroids typically have complex exposure histories and fragment during their atmospheric entry producing large strewn fields (e.g.,

Huber et al. 2008). Cosmogenic nuclide production rates are a function of depth, thus large meteoroids can only be dated reliably by using a combination of several cosmogenic isotope systems permitting to unravel complex exposure histories.

The terrestrial ages of the meteorites were calculated from the activity of cosmogenic ^{14}C in 0.04 g to 2.4 g (typically 0.5 g) subsamples of ordinary chondrites. Radiocarbon activities were analyzed using methods described elsewhere (Bland et al. 1998; Jull 2006; Jull et al. 1998; Jull et al. 1993; Jull et al. 1989; Jull et al. 1990). To remove terrestrial carbon, samples were cleaned with 85% phosphoric acid (to remove terrestrial carbonates) and heated to 500°C in air (to remove terrestrial low temperature components). All ^{14}C analyses were performed at the NSF-Arizona AMS Laboratory, University of Arizona, Tucson. The ages were calculated using ^{14}C production rates of 46.4 dpm/kg for H-chondrites, 51.1 dpm/kg for L-chondrites and 55.2 dpm/kg for LL-chondrites, respectively. The upper age range depends on the detection limit for ^{14}C , which is dependent on sample size. Most analyses were performed on samples of 0.1 to 0.2 g for practical reasons (lifetime of extraction line), with detection limits of ~ 0.5 dpm/kg ^{14}C corresponding to 30 to 35 ka. Some of our earlier measurements were performed on rather large samples of up to 1 g, yielding a ^{14}C detection limit corresponding to ages of up to ~ 55 ka. For statistics we used the minimal ages of samples close to detection limit.

Description of macroscopic weathering features

Macroscopically visible weathering effects were estimated for all ^{14}C dated meteorites and all samples collected during field campaigns 2009 and 2010 using a simple intensity scale ranging from 0 to 3 for each parameter (Table 1, Fig. 1). The following parameters were determined: Wind ablation on exposed surface (ES); sand on ES; fusion crust on ES; salt efflorescence on cut surface (CS) (Zurfluh et al. 2013); pores and pore space filling on CS; secondary crack abundance; white mineral precipitations on buried surface (BS); staining with secondary green Ni-minerals (Al-Kathiri et al. 2005); abundance of lichen; degree of red coloration of BS as compares with ES (color difference established using the rock color chart, (Goddard 1948).

The surfaces of fresh meteorites are either black where fusion crust (FC) is present (N1 on Goddard scale) or grey on broken surfaces (N3-5). With increasing weathering, the alteration

mineralogy is responsible for a dark, dusky brown color (5YR 2/2) of the meteorites. If a “red BS” evolves, the part of the meteorite buried in the soil attains a light brown color of 5YR (4-5)/6 or 5YR (3-5)/4 (Table 1, Fig.1d). All macroscopic weathering parameters are examined by naked eye and with the use of a binocular microscope. All samples were investigated independently by at least two persons to reduce personal bias.

Classification of weathering degree

The grade of weathering of meteorites is currently reported using thin-section observation and the scale defined by Wlotzka (1993). This classification scheme leaves some ambiguities in the definition of weathering steps, in particular W3 (Fig. 2a). Following Wlotzka (1993) W3 is defined as “heavy oxidation of metal and troilite, 60-95% being replaced”. It remains unclear to what exactly the percentages refer. Because weathering degree W2 (Wlotzka 1993) just takes into account the oxidation of metal (maximum 60% oxidized), it is not clear where to place meteorites with >60% of metal and <60% of combined metal+troilite altered. It is generally straightforward to distinguish altered Fe-Ni metal from altered troilite (Fig. 3). This is particularly relevant because many meteorites recovered in Oman show metal oxidation close to 95 % while the degree of alteration of troilite is often much lower, about 20% (Fig. 2b). It is well established that metal is oxidized first in meteorites under hot desert conditions whereas the alteration of troilite is slower (e.g., Al-Kathiri et al. 2005; Lee and Bland 2004). There are only a few exceptions where troilite is weathered preferentially compared to metal. Examples are two L chondrites from Western Australia at initial stages of weathering (Bevan et al. 2001; Ruzicka 1995). Samples from Antarctica often show no or only minor alteration of troilite (Lee and Bland 2004). We therefore introduce intermediate steps to the weathering grades 3 and 4 and a more detailed description of the altered phase (Table 2). To avoid confusion with the Wlotzka scale, we suggest to indicate classifications based on our scale with one decimal numbers (e.g., W3.0). Due to the incomplete definition of the W2/W3-boundary by Wlotzka (1993) in the original publication, we consider the upper limit of W2 (60% metal oxidation) as the lower limit for W3 (Fig. 2b). W3 is further divided into W3.0, W3.3 and W3.6 corresponding to troilite oxidation degrees of <20%, 20-60% and >60%, respectively. The boundary to W4 remains at 95% oxidation of metal and 95% oxidation of troilite. We include an additional extension W4.5 to account for samples where essentially no

metal and troilite is left (if not fully enclosed in silicates). The Wlotzka (1993) definition of W5 is problematic, as we often observe beginning alteration of mafic silicates in samples belonging to W3 based on metal and troilite oxidation (Fig. 3). In the collection of ~880 unpaired samples found in Oman we have only one sample classified as W5.0. Stage W6.0 was not observed among our finds from Oman and is adopted unmodified (Table 2).

W3 actually comprises the major part of the alteration history of ordinary chondrites. Most importantly, our refined scale for weathering degree classification is compatible with the official scale (Wlotzka 1993), for example, a previous W3 meteorite will remain at the same stage but could be either a W3.0, W3.3 or W3.6 (Fig. 2b). The stages W0, W1 and W2 were adopted unmodified. To take also into account the possible preferred weathering of troilite as observed in Australian chondrites (Bevan et al. 2001; Ruzicka 1995) further division of weathering stages W1 and W2 (analogous to W3 into W3.0, W3.3 and W3.6) might be applied (Fig. 2b).

For the calculation of correlations, each step of the weathering degrees was treated independently with a number assigned, i.e. W0.0 = 0 to W6.0 = 9.

Quantification of terrestrial elemental contamination

All ^{14}C dated meteorites were non-destructively analyzed for their elemental composition with a Thermo Scientific NITON XL3t-600 handheld energy dispersive X-ray Fluorescence (HHXRF) analyzer placed in a mobile test stand. To obtain proper results for meteorites a slightly adjusted calibration of the “mining mode” was used (Zurfluh et al. 2011). Elements analyzed for are K, Ca, Ti, V, Cr, Mn, Fe, Co, Ni, Zn, As, Sr, Mo, Ba and Pb. All analyzed elements were evaluated for correlation with terrestrial age. The signal depth depends on the measured element and ranges from about 5 mm (Ba) to <1 mm for most elements (Zurfluh et al. 2011). Measurements were performed on exposed surfaces (ES), buried surfaces (BS) and cut surfaces (CS). Each measuring spot has a diameter of 8 mm. Since it is not possible to reconstruct the find situation of each meteorite, the more general term “natural surface” (NS) is used for unspecified external surfaces. On each surface at least three measurements were taken and the median values were taken for further calculations. The detection limit of Ba (around 100 $\mu\text{g/g}$) is relatively high. Initial Ba concentration of OC are between 3 to 5 $\mu\text{g/g}$ (Wasson and Kallemeyn 1988). Small degrees of Ba contaminations are not detectable with HHXRF, therefore. The detection limit for V is also around 100 $\mu\text{g/g}$.

Other chemical parameters that showed a correlation with terrestrial ages (Al-Kathiri et al. 2005), like H₂O or sulfur concentration, are not used in this study, since they cannot be analyzed by HHXRF and therefore are not suitable for the evaluation of large numbers of samples.

RESULTS

¹⁴C terrestrial ages

In this work we use 128 ¹⁴C terrestrial ages of meteorites. Fifty of them were reported by Al-Kathiri et al., (2005). Additional data were determined by Jull et al. (2008) and Giscard et al. (2009). 51 new terrestrial ages are reported in this paper (Table 3, a compilation of all used ¹⁴C ages is given in Table S1). The 51 new ages comprise 8 LL, 17 L and 26 H chondrites. Overall, the ages range from <1 ka up to the limit of the ¹⁴C method, 30 to 55 ka (Welten et al. 2004). The new ¹⁴C age data are shown in Table 3. The mean age of the newly dated meteorites is 19.6 ka (median: 17.9 ka; st. dev.: 10.2 ka), which is congruent to the mean of the previous set, 21.5 ka (median 17.9 ka; st. dev.: 13.0 ka; Al-Kathiri et al., 2005). For all dated meteorites, the mean terrestrial age is 21.0 ka, the abundance maximum is 19.9 ka (median: 19.5 ka; st. dev.: 11.3 ka), whereas the percentage of samples of 0 to 10 ka is 19% and of samples >30 ka ~25%. The age distribution of all ¹⁴C dated Omani ordinary chondrites (Fig. 4a) is characterized by a prominent lack of samples in the age range 0 to 10 ka, as previously observed based on a smaller dataset (Al-Kathiri et al. 2005).

Macroscopic weathering parameters and terrestrial age

Figure 5 shows the variation of ¹⁴C terrestrial ages as a function of the intensity of macroscopic weathering parameters. There is a clear general increase of terrestrial ages with increasing intensity of the weathering for seven of the parameters (Fig. 5 a to g), only greenish staining due to Ni-serpentine precipitation on BS and calcite deposition on BS (Fig. 5 h, i) do not seem to be age correlated. Correlations (Table S2) of three macroscopic weathering parameters (salt on CS, fusion crust, sand attached on ES) are relatively high (R =

0.60 to 0.66) with the weathering degree, the same parameters also show elevated correlations with terrestrial age ($R = 0.47$ to 0.50). Correlations of macroscopic weathering parameters with chemical weathering parameters are only weak.

Weathering degree and terrestrial age

The weathering degree was determined for all ^{14}C dated ordinary chondrites from Oman using the refined scale (see methods). Plots of weathering degree versus ^{14}C terrestrial age (Fig. 6) show a clear increase of age with increasing weathering degree, but the variation of ages is quite large for single weathering degrees. We observe a positive correlation of the refined weathering scale with ^{14}C terrestrial age ($R = 0.60$), notably also for the newly defined stages W3.0 to W4.5 (Fig. 6). A plot of the median values of the ages for each weathering degree (Fig. 6b) shows that all three ordinary chondrite groups show comparable increases of terrestrial ages with increasing weathering degree, with correlations increasing from types H to LL (H: $R=0.53$, L: $R=0.60$ and LL: $R=0.81$). The weathering degree shows the best correlation of all investigated parameters with the terrestrial age.

Chemical parameters

From the meteorites collected in Oman, 368 meteorites were analyzed using handheld XRF (HHXRF). In total, the data of 5586 measurements were evaluated (Table S1). The most prominent contaminations are by Sr and Ba, consistent with the results of other studies on hot desert meteorites (e.g., Al-Kathiri et al. 2005; Crozaz et al. 2003; Nazarov et al. 2004b; Saunier et al. 2010; Shih et al. 2002; Stelzner et al. 1999). The highest concentrations on CS are $888\text{ }\mu\text{g/g}$ for Sr and $554\text{ }\mu\text{g/g}$ for Ba, respectively. On natural surfaces of the meteorites, contaminations are typically much higher. Profiles measured through cut slabs of several meteorites showed relatively constant concentrations in the interior and highly elevated concentrations either on one or both of the natural surfaces (ES or BS; Fig. 7). In most analyzed meteorites, the accumulation of Sr and Ba, as well as of Mn and V, elements typically associated with desert varnish (Dorn 2009; Engel and Sharp 1958), is similar on ES and BS. Maximum values detected on natural surfaces (comprising ES and/or BS) are $\sim 3500\text{ }\mu\text{g/g}$ for Sr and $\sim 650\text{ }\mu\text{g/g}$ for Ba. To test for correlations between elemental contaminations and terrestrial age, data from 98 ^{14}C dated chondrites (14 LL, 34 L and 50 H) were evaluated.

The resulting correlations of the chemical parameters with ^{14}C terrestrial ages are relatively weak when compared with correlations between weathering degree or macroscopic weathering parameters and ^{14}C terrestrial age (Table S2). For the elements with the best correlations (Ba_{ES} , Cr_{BS} , $\text{Fe}_{\text{CS}}/\text{Mn}_{\text{CS}}$, $\text{Mn}_{\text{ES}}/\text{Mn}_{\text{CS}}$, Sr_{CS} , Sr_{ES} and V_{BS}), median concentrations for different age steps are shown in Figure S1.

All other measured elements either show no significant variation caused by terrestrial alteration (K, Ca, Ti, Co, Ni), or concentrations are near to below limits of detection (Zn, As, Mo, Pb).

DISCUSSION

^{14}C terrestrial age distribution

The newly-obtained terrestrial ages (Table 3) confirm the previously observed (Al-Kathiri et al. 2005; Jull 2006) relative abundance of ^{14}C age groups observed in Oman. The mean ^{14}C age is 21.0 ka and there is a prominent lack of young (<10 ka) samples (Fig. 4). Since we have dated only a limited number of the found meteorites (corrected for pairing: 111 out of about 880 fall events or about 12%), two selected meteorite populations were used as a control: i) all samples found on petrified, fossil dunes of the western Ramlat al Wahibah, named RaW and ii) all LL samples. These two groups show a similar age pattern with a lack of young (<10 ka) and old (>40 ka) meteorites, even though those two populations are less representative due to the low number of samples (Fig. S2).

A similar terrestrial age (and weathering grade) distribution as in Oman was observed for a smaller OC population ($n = 21$) from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), found in the same geological environment as the meteorites from Oman (Hezel et al. 2011).

Considering all OC collected by our group since 2001 (corrected for pairing, not all reclassified for refined weathering degree), we still observe a dramatic lack of samples at low weathering grades ($W \leq 2$) or heavily weathered samples (only one W5 sample!). We believe this underabundance of young and old samples is present in the whole population. The same situation applies for the population of OC collected by other groups in Oman with independently determined weathering degrees (c.f. Meteoritical Society Database).

Only six of the analyzed meteorites showed no detectable ^{14}C . In general, few meteorites from the hot deserts of northern Africa, Arabia, Australia and north America show

high terrestrial ages and no detectable ^{14}C , indicating that only rare samples survive longer than ~40 to 50 ka under the prevalent conditions. One OC with very high terrestrial age is known from the Dar al Gani area (DaG 343, H4 S2 W4), with a ^{41}Ca terrestrial age of 150 ± 40 ka, (Welten et al. 2004). Other meteorites from hot deserts with high terrestrial ages are lunar meteorite Dhofar 025 (0.5 – 0.6 Ma) and the shergottite Dhofar 019 (0.34 Ma, (Nishiizumi et al. 2002). On the other hand, OC populations from the Atacama desert in Chile appear to be dominated by meteorites with generally higher terrestrial ages (Gattacceca et al. 2011).

Meteorites of weathering degrees >4.5 might be missing due to the neutralization and passivation that occurs at W4.0 (Bland et al. 1998; Zurfluh et al. 2013). The cementation of pore space, washing out of salts and neutral to basic pH conditions after completion of troilite oxidation, slow chemical weathering processes. Physical weathering, most prominently wind ablation, dominates the late weathering history of OC from Oman.

Given a constant flux and age-dependent weathering, the age-abundance function should be decreasing with age, the youngest age group being the most abundant (Jull 2006). The observed under abundance of very young (<10 ka) OC is difficult to explain. Possible scenarios are: (i) selective removal by recent fast weathering of exposed young meteorites, while the old population is mostly buried; (ii) selective removal due to collection of unaltered meteorites by humans; (iii) selective burial of fresh falls in the soil; (iv) recent change of the meteorite flux; (v) a generally much higher age of the population combined with common contamination of old meteorites with ^{14}C , resulting in the ~20 ka abundance maximum. These scenarios are discussed in the following: (i) We see no evidence of unusually rapid erosion or weathering among the young meteorites. While the meteorite recovery areas of Oman experienced periods of more humid climatic conditions around 10 to 5 ka ago (Fleitmann and Matter 2009; Preusser 2009), the last 5 ka were dominated by relatively dry conditions. (ii) If humans had preferentially collected young meteorites (e.g., as source of iron), there should be evidence of such use in the archaeological collections of Oman, which is not the case (Hofmann et al. 2014). (iii) Freshly fallen meteorites of small to moderate size (tens to hundreds of grams), constituting the majority of the Oman desert meteorite population, typically are found on the surface of various types of soils and are not buried (e.g., Aoudjehane et al. 2012; Shaddad et al. 2010). (iv) Based on fireball observations and studies of old meteorite populations dated for terrestrial age, e.g., from Antarctica (Zolensky 1998),

it is assumed that meteorite flux was constant over the period meteorites have accumulated in Oman (Bland et al. 1996; Halliday et al. 1989; Zolensky et al. 2006). In addition, if the flux was higher 15 to 20 ka ago, similar patterns had to be observed in other recovery areas, which is not the case. The meteorite population from western Australia has a higher percentage of young samples and shows an expected age distribution, i.e., decreasing abundances of samples with increasing terrestrial age (Jull et al. 2010). Also, meteorites from Algeria show an approximately exponential drop-off with increasing terrestrial age (Jull 2006). A similar situation, like that of Oman, is observed in the Roosevelt County, New Mexico, recovery areas, where a similar lack of young meteorites is observed (Jull 2006). There, meteorites are found in blowouts in the cover sands of late Quaternary age, which might explain the deficiency of younger meteorites (Zolensky et al. 1992). In Oman we observe that meteorites must have been buried in sand/soil for parts of their terrestrial residence as we frequently find meteorites with attached sand on buried as well as exposed surfaces (e.g., Fig. 1c). (v) Contamination with ^{14}C during terrestrial residence is possible, but care is taken by cleaning of samples before analysis by acid treatment and then heating in oxygen (Jull 2006). A high age of the population would be required, which is inconsistent with weathering rates observed in other hot desert areas. Also, the observed correlations between ^{14}C ages and weathering parameters would be difficult to explain.

Correlations of weathering parameters with ^{14}C terrestrial age and age estimation

The search for correlations between weathering parameters and terrestrial ages was motivated by the idea to find a set of chemical and/or physical parameters that would allow an independent estimation of the terrestrial age of meteorites. With ~880 different fall events represented in our collection of Omani meteorites, it appears impractical to obtain ^{14}C ages for all of them, while understanding the age distribution of the whole population is one of our goals. In general, the observed correlations (Table S2, Figs. 5, 6 and S1) are rather weak and there is considerable scatter in the data.

We have evaluated the correlation between the newly defined weathering degree and ^{14}C ages, as this parameter shows the best correlation ($R=0.60$) and is relatively easy to obtain. The ^{14}C age-weathering degree correlation clearly benefits from the refinement of the

stages W3 into W3.0, W3.3 and W3.6 and W4 into W4.0 and W4.5. The eight weathering degrees observed (W0 to W4.5) only allow the assignment of eight ages. Based on the mean and standard deviation of ^{14}C ages of each weathering degree, the following ages are assigned: W0: 2 ± 2 ka (arbitrary, only one sample), W1: 8.3 ± 3.5 ka ($n = 8$), W2: 11.0 ± 5.6 ka ($n = 20$), W3.0: 14.5 ± 6.3 ka ($n = 23$), W3.3: 17.4 ± 6.1 ka ($n = 15$), W3.6: 23.2 ± 10.2 ka ($n = 13$), W4.0: 27.9 ± 9.1 ka ($n = 39$), W4.5: 32.5 ± 9.9 ka ($n = 9$). Using the number of samples of each weathering degree and the above values only, we calculated a model age distribution with 5 ka bins (Fig. 8) by adding gaussian probability curves. The obtained probability distribution is very similar to the observed one. The mean deviation of calculated relative to observed numbers of samples in each 5 ka age bin is $<10\%$, the correlation factor for measured versus modeled sample numbers per age bin is 0.97. The mean age calculated from the modeled distribution is 20.4 ka (mean of analyzed samples: 19.9 ka). We conclude that weathering degree-based age estimations can reliably be used for the calculation of age probability plots for whole meteorite populations. However, the error of age estimations for single samples is too large for a meaningful use in most applications.

Chemical weathering parameters

No single chemical parameter shows a good correlation with terrestrial age. This is likely due to the fact that concentrations of contaminating elements are heterogeneous on single samples, both on a natural surfaces (ES, BS, NS) and in the interior (cut surface, CS). In addition, contamination profiles (Fig. 7) are not linear and the degree of contamination likely is not strictly time dependent since it is affected by a number of factors including porosity, which is variable initially and is subject to repeated changes during weathering history (Bland et al. 1998; Britt and Consolmagno 2003; Consolmagno et al. 2008; Macke et al. 2010; Zurfluh et al. 2013). Another factor influencing elemental contamination is wind erosion. Thin coatings (desert varnish like) of contaminants on natural surfaces are continuously eroded by sand blasting. Wind ablation is a strong physical weathering process and is observed on nearly all (older) meteorites from Oman. Superficial concentrations of Sr, Ba and V are highly variable. The best correlations with ^{14}C terrestrial age among the chemical weathering parameters are shown by the ratio of Mn_{ES} relative to Mn_{CS} and by $\text{Fe}_{\text{CS}}/\text{Mn}_{\text{CS}}$, Table S2). The higher $\text{Mn}_{\text{ES}}/\text{Mn}_{\text{CS}}$ ratios for older meteorites indicate Mn accumulation due

to desert varnish formation. In an approach similar to ours, the possible use for age dating of Mn-accumulations quantified using by HHXRF on varnished rock surfaces with petroglyphs has been evaluated by various authors with limited success (Lytle 2009; Lytle et al. 2000; Pingitore and Lytle 2003; Pingitore et al. 2004).

The age dependent variations of Fe/Mn ratios on CS likely are a result of the analytical method (HHXRF). The presence of Fe metal grains in a silicate matrix results in an underestimation of bulk Fe due to high self absorption of X-rays in Fe metal. To minimize these effects, the instrument was calibrated using powders and hand specimens (Zurfluh et al. 2011). During weathering, iron is partially redistributed resulting in a bulk sample with more homogeneous absorption coefficients. The Fe/Mn ratio determined by HHXRF indirectly determines the oxidation degree, therefore. The effect was observed in all groups, even in metal-poor LL chondrites.

CONCLUSIONS

Several macroscopic, microscopic, and chemical weathering parameters observed in ordinary chondrites from Oman show a correlation with the ^{14}C terrestrial age of the respective meteorites, but the correlations are generally rather weak, especially in the case of chemical parameters. The best correlation is obtained using a refined weathering degree scale defined in this work, which is based on and refines the Wlotzka (1993) scale. We demonstrate that the terrestrial age distribution as observed among 128 ^{14}C dated meteorites could be reconstructed as age probability diagrams using weathering degree and mean ^{14}C ages of the age groups. This offers the possibility to determine age distributions for the whole Oman meteorite collection, once the refined weathering degrees are determined for all samples. The ^{14}C terrestrial age distribution of ordinary chondrites from Oman, characterized by an abundance maximum at 19.9 ka and a lack of young (0 to 10 ka) samples remains poorly understood and requires further research.

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Tables

622 Table 1. Macroscopic weathering parameters

Intensity Code	Abbreviation	N = 0	N = 1	N = 2	N = 3
Wind ablation on [ES]	Wind _{ES}	No wind ablation visible	FC/rock surface with cavities/mild wind-polishing	"Monadnocks"/strong polishing	Ventifact, striation visible
Sand on [ES]	Sand _{ES}	No attached sand*	Some isolated sand grains attached	Abundant sand-grain-aggregates attached	No attached sand [#]
Fusion crust (FC) on [ES]	FC _{ES}	FC preserved [>80%]	FC partly eroded [20-80%]	Some FC remnants [2-20%]	No FC [<2%] preserved
Salt on [CS]	Salt _{CS}	No salts or hygroscopic behavior visible*	Few isolated droplets of hygroscopic salts	Extreme salt efflorescence / hygroscopic behavior	No salt or hygroscopic behavior visible [#]
Pore space on [CS]	Pore _{CS}	No macroscopic pore space	Empty pores	Pore space partially filled	All pore space filled
Cracks [ES]	Crack _{ES}	No cracks	Only few, narrow cracks	Several (wide) cracks, meteorite at most broken into a few pieces (usually <10).	Abundant wide cracks, whole meteorite broken into many pieces.
White precipitations [BS]	CC _{BS}	No white precipitation on buried surface	Isolated spots, white precipitation inside cracks	White precipitations spread mainly along and from cracks	Abundant white precipitation. >25% of [BS]. All cracks have precipitation of white minerals. White precipitations are also strongly present at the border of [ES] to [BS].
Green [BS]	Green _{BS}	No green Ni-rich minerals present on buried surface of the meteorite	A few isolated greenish spots within cracks are present. Mostly associated with terrestrial sand grains and iron hydroxides	Greenish minerals are abundant along cracks	Greenish staining occurs widely on the buried surface: along cracks, on the border of [ES] to [BS] and on spots with attached sand as well as iron hydroxide bloomings

Lichen on [ES]	Lichen _{ES}	No lichen	A few isolated lichens are present; <20% coverage of meteorite	Area wide lichen covers the meteorite, 20-80%	Full coverage meteorite by lichen, >80%
Red [BS]	Red _{BS}	Same as on [ES]	Small area of BS has slightly reddish color	Abundant red, >10% of [BS]	Bright rusty/red, >75% of [BS]

CS: cut surface

BS: buried surface

ES: exposed surface

* $N(FC) \geq 1$, $N(Wind) \leq 1$, $N(Red) \leq 1$ and if macroscopically fresh metal is visible on CS ($W \leq 2.0$)

$N(FC) \leq 1$, $N(Wind) \geq 1$ and when macroscopically no metal flakes are visible on CS ($W \geq 3.6$)

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Table 2. The refined weathering degree classification

Weathering degree	Metal oxidation [vol%]	Troilite oxidation [vol%]	Comments
W0.0	0	0	Fresh, some iron-hydroxide staining possible
W1.0	<20	≥0	Minor oxide rims around metal and troilite, small iron oxides and iron hydroxide veins might be already present
W2.0	20-60	<20	Onset of veining with iron oxides and iron hydroxides
W3.0	>60	<20	Strong oxidation of metal, troilite shows only minor alteration
W3.3	>60	20-60	Strong oxidation of metal, troilite moderately altered. Usually a few troilites are completely oxidized
W3.6	>60 [§]	>60 [§]	Strong oxidation of metal and troilite. Most troilites are oxidized or show reduced reflectivity.
W4.0	>95	>95	Nearly complete oxidation of metal and troilite, usually some troilite remnants are visible
W4.5	100	100	All metal and troilite oxidized, only minor remnants of metal and troilite as inclusions in silicates; some silicate alteration (mainly olivine) possible
W5.0*	100	100	Metal and troilite 100% oxidized, major alteration of silicates, mainly olivine.
W6.0 [#]	100	100	Massive replacement of silicates by clay and oxides

[§] When metal and troilite each are oxidized >95vol% the sample is classified as W4.0, while a sample with 100 vol% metal alteration and 90 vol% troilite alteration is still a W3.6.

* Since we have only one W5.0 sample in our collection, the definition of this step is still vague.

[#] W6.0 if fully adopted from Wlotzka (1993) since we have no such sample in our collection.

Classification guide:

The thin section should be prepared from a representative part of the interior of the sample. If several stages are visible take the mean.

Troilite and metal inclusions in shock veins, shock melts or other protecting materials should be excluded for classification.

628 Table 3. Classification and new terrestrial ages of OC from Oman.

Name	Class	P	S	W	^{14}C [dpm kg $^{-1}$]			TA [ka]		
Al Huqf 063	L	6	S2	3.6	3.0	±	0.8	23.4	±	2.6
Al Huqf 065	L	6	S5	2.0	49.4	±	2.0	0.3	±	1.3
Al Huqf 069	H	4/5	S2	3.0	0.7	±	0.3	34.3	±	3.5
JaH 343	LL	6	S3	1.0	24.5	±	1.0	6.7	±	1.3
JaH 413	H	4	S1	3.0	10.1	±	1.0	12.6	±	1.5
JaH 416	L	6	S5	4.0	2.9	±	0.8	23.8	±	2.7
JaH 418	H	4	S3	3.6	1.9	±	1.0	26.2	±	4.5
JaH 423	H	4	S3	3.3	5.3	±	0.6	18.0	±	1.6
JaH 474	LL	3.7-6	S2	3.0	27.7	±	1.1	5.7	±	1.3
JaH 493	L	6	S3-4	3.3	2.5	±	0.8	25.0	±	3.1
JaH 498	L	6	S4	3.6	1.7	±	0.8	28.3	±	4.0
JaH 578	H	6	S2	1.0	10.1	±	0.4	12.6	±	1.3
JaH 579	L	4-6	S3-5	3.3	16.0	±	0.4	9.6	±	1.3
JaH 620	L	6	S4	2.0	14.7	±	0.7	10.3	±	1.4
QaM 001	LL	4-6	S2	3.0	25.6	±	0.6	6.3	±	1.3
RaS 242	LL	4	S3	3.0	2.8	±	0.6	24.5	±	2.3
RaS 262	LL	6	S3	1.0	25.6	±	0.9	6.4	±	1.3
RaS 267	LL	6	S1	4.0	1.4	±	0.7	30.5	±	4.4
RaS 281	H	3-6	S2	3.0	5.3	±	0.3	17.9	±	1.4
RaS 290	L	6	S4	3.3	5.4	±	0.4	18.5	±	1.4
RaS 292	L	6	S2	3.0	14.1	±	0.3	9.8	±	1.3
RaS 295	H	4	S2	3.0	18.6	±	1.0	7.5	±	1.4
RaS 297	L	6	S4	4.5	2.2	±	0.3	25.9	±	1.7
RaS 302	H	4	S2	3.6	0.7	±	0.4	35.0	±	5.7
RaS 304	H	6	S2	3.3	6.2	±	0.4	16.2	±	1.4
RaS 316	L	5	S3	4.5	6.5	±	0.3	17.1	±	1.4
RaS 322	H	3	S1	3.0	13.7	±	0.3	10.1	±	1.3
RaW 002	H	4/5	S2	2.0	8.1	±	0.9	14.4	±	1.6
RaW 005	H	5	S3	4.0	0.7	±	1.2	34.2	±	13.1
RaW 007	H	5	S2	4.0	2.0	±	0.8	25.9	±	3.5
RaW 008	L	4	S2	3.0	2.3	±	0.8	25.5	±	3.2
RaW 010	H	4	S2-3	4.0	2.3	±	1.2	25.0	±	4.4
RaW 014	H	5	S2	2.0	20.2	±	0.9	6.9	±	1.3
RaW 015	H	5	S3	3.0	9.1	±	0.8	13.4	±	1.5
RaW 016	L	6	S4-5	4.5	1.0	±	0.6	32.5	±	5.4
RaW 017	H	5	S2	3.0	19.6	±	1.1	7.1	±	1.4
RaW 019	H	6	S1	4.5	0.9	±	0.8	32.2	±	7.1
RaW 021	H	5	S1	4.0	1.4	±	1.1	28.9	±	6.4
RaW 024	H	5	S2	1.0	32.7	±	1.2	2.9	±	1.3
RaW 027	H	5	S2-3	4.5	0.5	±	0.9	37.0	±	13.5
RaW 031	H	4	S2	3.0	3.3	±	0.9	22.0	±	2.7
RaW 034	LL	3-5	S2	0.0	23.9	±	1.0	6.9	±	1.3
RaW 035	H	5	S2	3.6	2.3	±	0.9	24.9	±	3.4
RaW 032	L	6	S4	4.5	<0.5			>38		
RaW 038	H	5	S2	4.5	<0.5			>38		
SaU 420	LL	6	S2	3.3	12.2	±	0.9	12.5	±	1.4
SaU 523	L	6	S4	3.3	6.5	±	1.1	17.0	±	1.9
Shalim 008	H	5	S3	2.0	5.8	±	0.3	17.2	±	1.4

UaS 009	L	6	S4	4.0	0.9	±	0.4	33.3	±	3.6
UaS 011	H	4	S1	3.0	3.1	±	0.4	22.4	±	1.6
UaS 013	L	6	S4	2.0	7.8	±	0.3	15.6	±	1.3

629 P: Petrologic type
630 S: Shock level
631 W: Weathering degree
632 TA: Terrestrial age
633 n.a.: not available
634

Figures

Fig. 1. Macroscopically visible weathering parameters. a) RaS 381, L6 S3 W3.3, shows prominent wind erosion on the exposed surface (ES). The buried part (BS) has still some remnants of fusion crust (FC). b) The cut surface (CS) of JaH 100, H4-5 S1 W3.0, shows efflorescences due to contamination with hygroscopic salts. Salt efflorescence also occurs on the exposed surface (ES) and some sand grains are attached due to precipitation of iron hydroxides on ES. The buried surface (BS) has attached caliche. c) Meteorite RaS 401, L3.8 S2 W3.3, recovered near dunes displays patches of attached sand. Empty pores are visible on cut surface (CS). d) The buried part of RaS 284, LL5 S1 W3.3, has a slightly reddish color and is distinct in color to that of ES.

Fig. 2. Weathering classification based on degree of oxidation of iron and troilite. a) Interpretation of the Wlotzka (1993) weathering grade classification. Metal oxidation of 20-60% defines W2. W3 and “W4” are subject to interpretation; the combined area considers the most logical. “W4” is interpreted to be >95% alteration of each metal and troilite individually. b) Our refined classification of weathering degrees divides W3 into three intermediate steps based on the degree of oxidation of troilite (W3.0, W3.3 and W3.6) The dashed lines indicate possible further subdivisions for W1.X and W2.X (not realized in our samples). Plotted data are for ordinary chondrite samples from Oman indicating typical weathering paths (Al-Kathiri et al. 2005).

Fig. 3. Reflected light photomicrographs of OCs from Oman showing typical examples of different weathering degrees. Note the continuous alteration of Fe-Ni-metal (white) and yellowish troilite to grey iron oxides and iron hydroxides and the increasing veining with iron (oxi)hydroxides. Scale bar at bottom right is 200 μm . a) SaU 424, L6 S3 W0.0 b) JaH 578, H6 S2 W1.0 c) RaS 311 H4-6 S3 W2.0 d) Al Huqf 069, H4/5 S2 W3.0 e) RaS 304, H6 S2 W3.3 f) RaS 114, H5 S1/2 W3.6 g) RaW 022, H5 S3 W4.0 h) RaW 041, H6 S1 W4.5

Fig. 4. Histograms of a) ^{14}C terrestrial ages and of b) weathering degrees.

Fig. 5. Terrestrial ages of OCs as a function of macroscopically visible weathering parameters showing median values, 50 percentile boxes and full range of data.

Fig. 6. Relation between terrestrial ages and weathering degrees of OC from Oman. a) All data, showing a general increase, with a lot of scatter, of ^{14}C ages with increasing weathering degree. b) Median terrestrial ages for individual weathering degrees. No significant difference between H, L and LL chondrites are discernible. Note the systematic increase of terrestrial ages among the newly defined weathering subgroups W3.0-W4.5.

Fig. 7. Profiles of Sr and Mn concentrations on exposed/cut/buried surfaces of OC measured with HHXRF. Distance 0 indicates a spot measured on the exposed surface. The lowermost point was obtained on the buried surface. The shaded area indicates the part of the meteorite originally buried in the soil. a) JaH 468, L6 S3 W2.0, shows Sr enrichment on ES and BS. b)

Meteorite RaS 340, L6 S4 W4.0, shows dominant Sr enrichment on ES. c) RaS 341, L6 S1 W1.0, shows dominant Sr contamination in its lower part. d) A sample from the JaH 091 strewn field (L5 S2), shows Mn enrichments both on ES and BS.

Fig. 8. Modeling of the age-frequency distribution with 5 ka age bins. Filled circles show the ^{14}C age distribution of all analyzed OC's. Empty squares show the age distribution calculated from weathering degrees (see text) for the same group of 128 OC's.

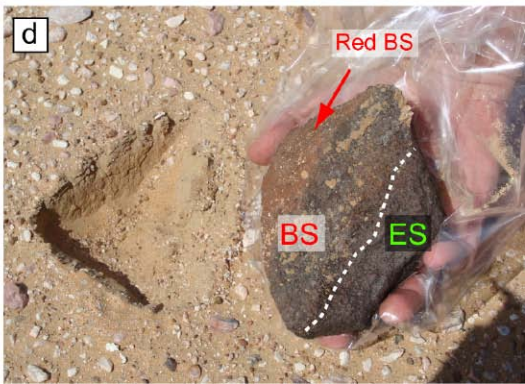
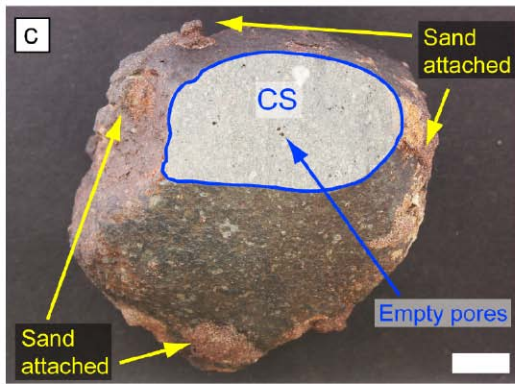
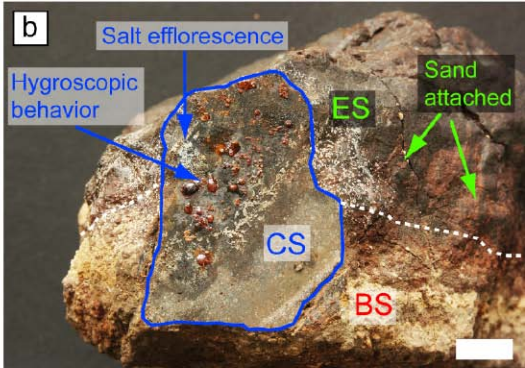
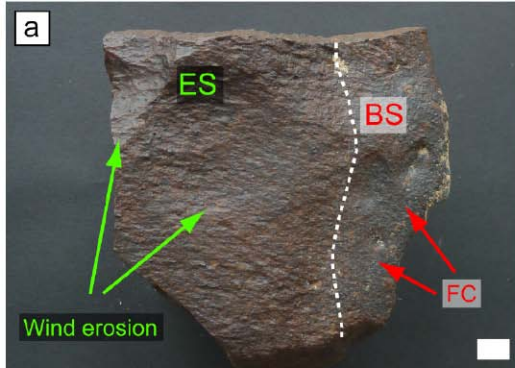
Supplementary information:

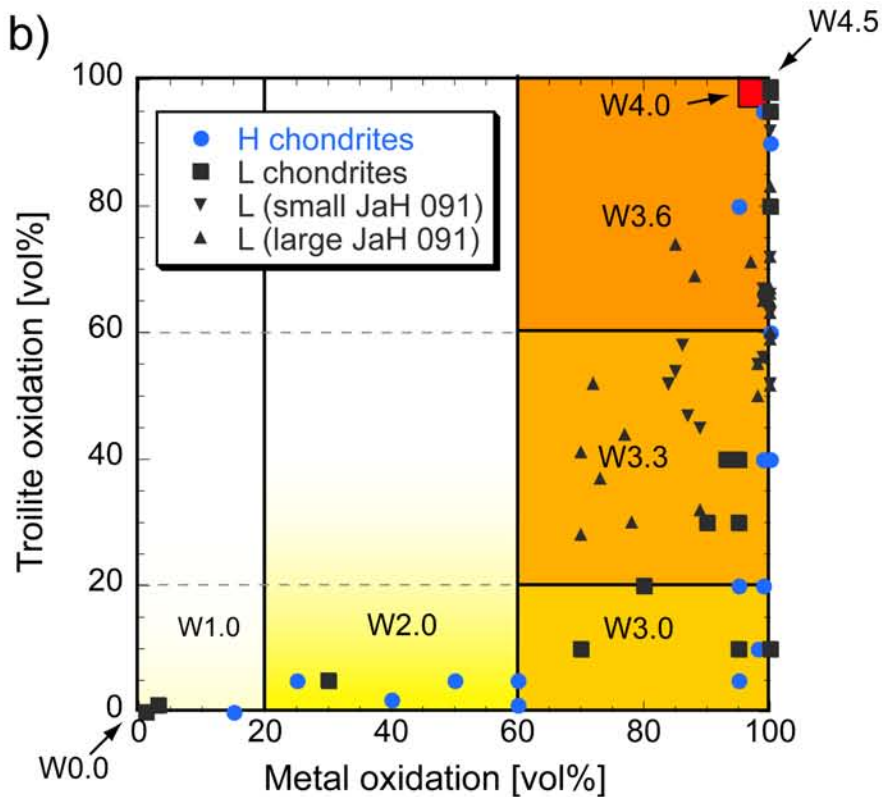
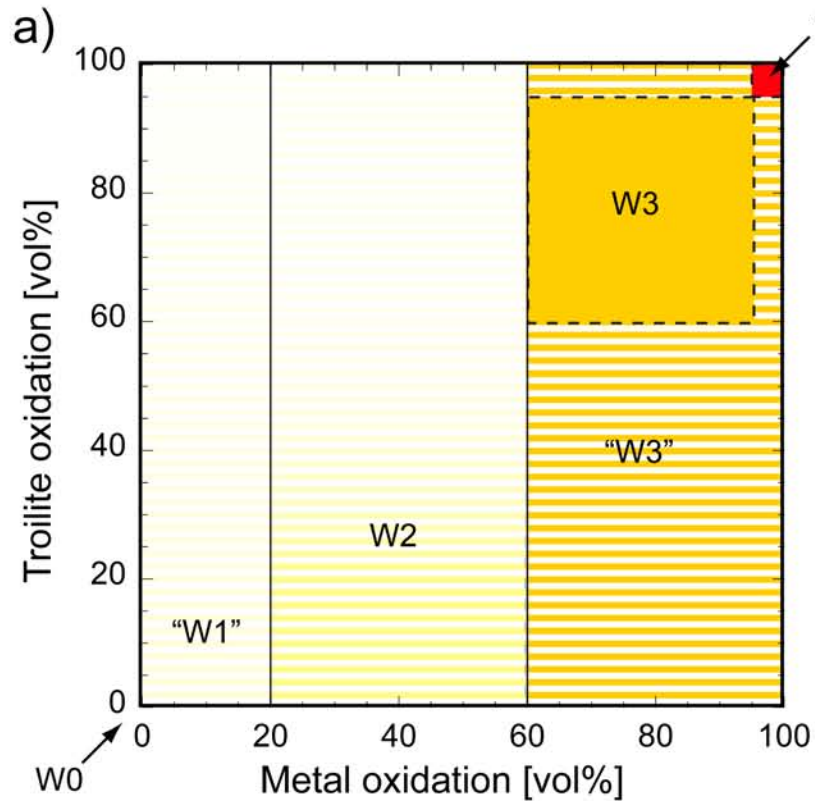
Fig. S1. Data used for age estimations with chemical parameters. The plots a), c), e), g), i) and k) are data as analyzed by HHXRF. Each data point represents the median of at least three measurements. At right, the median element concentrations of 5 ka age steps of all OC groups are displayed in b), d), f), h), j) and l).

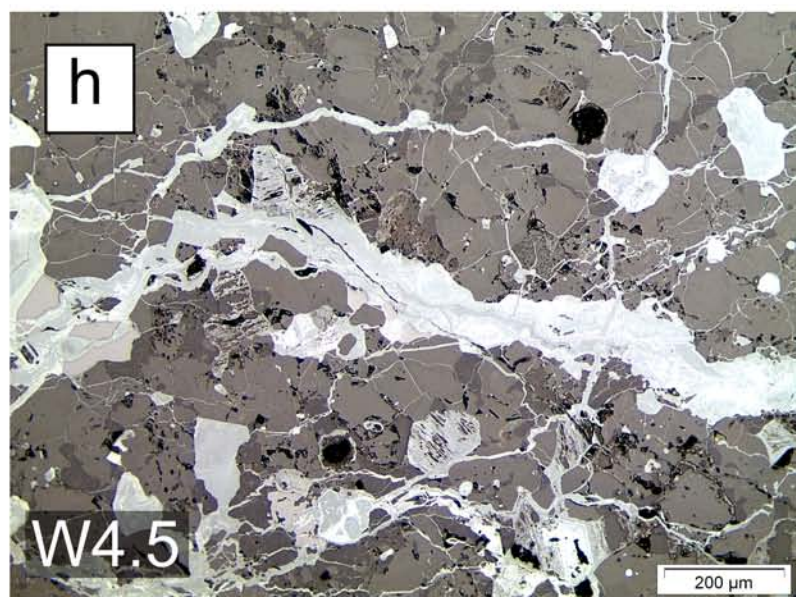
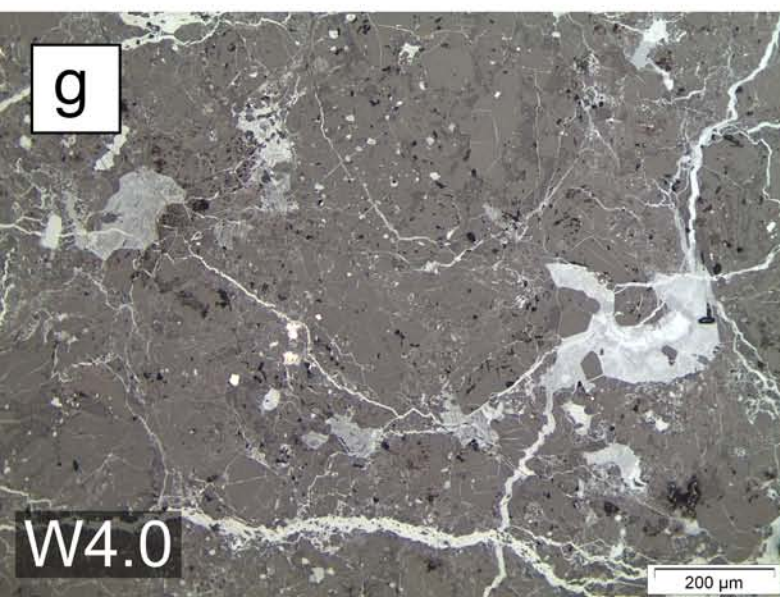
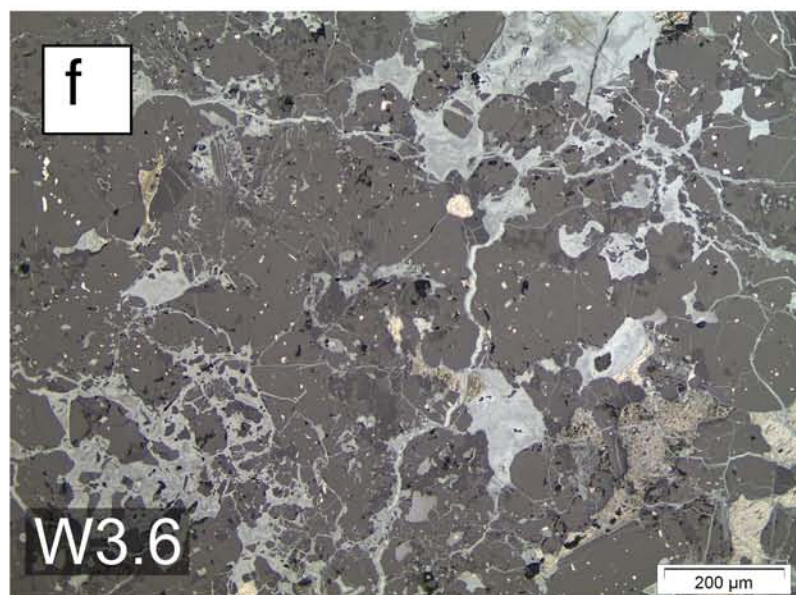
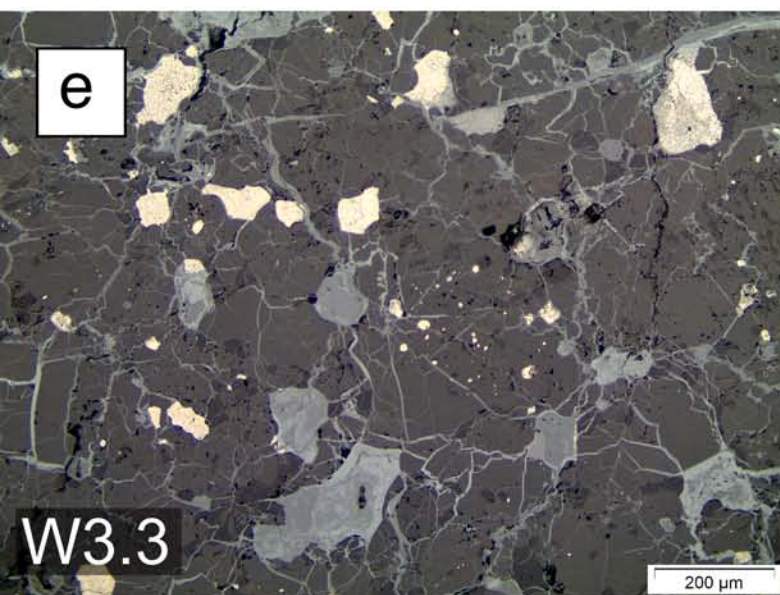
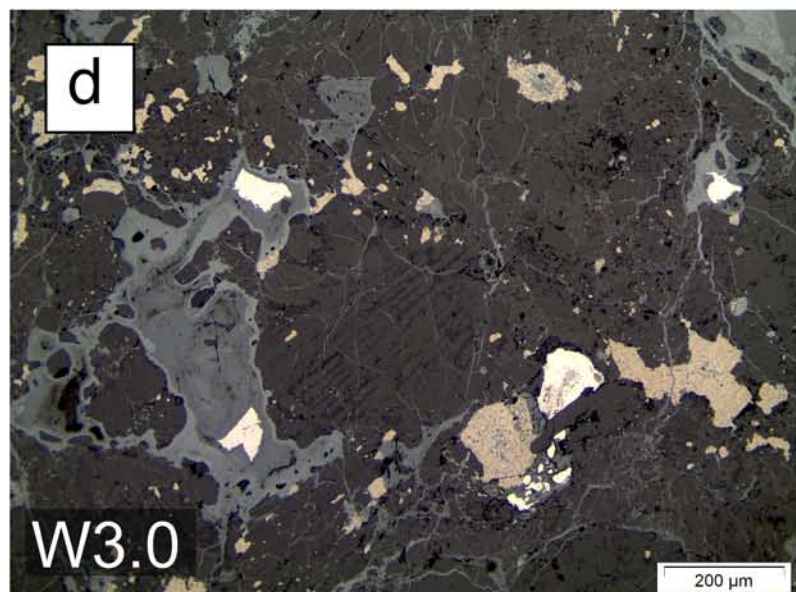
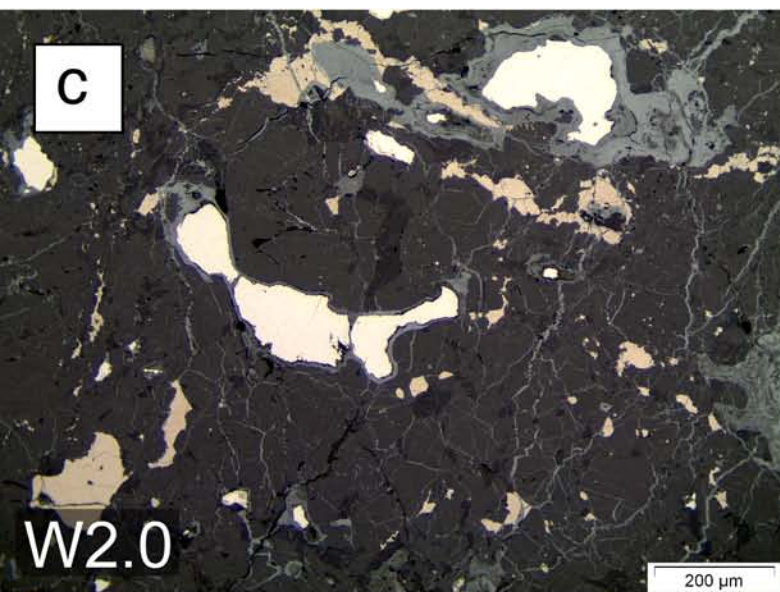
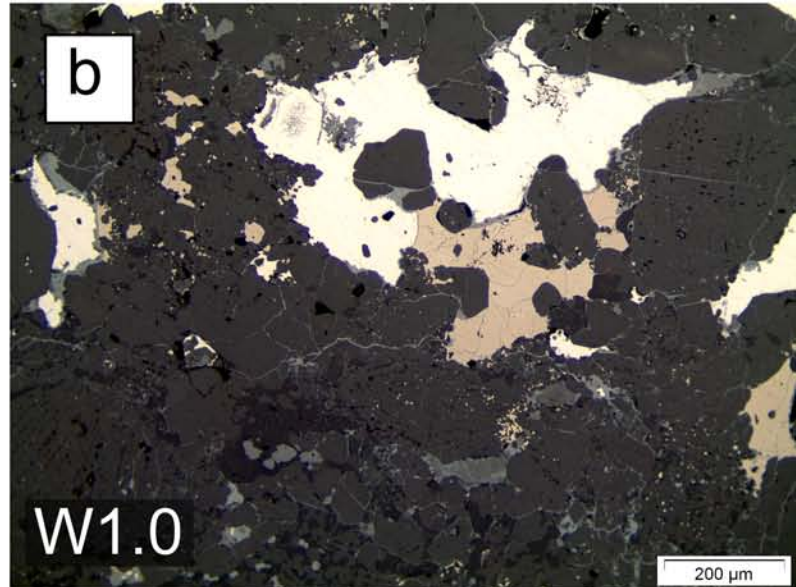
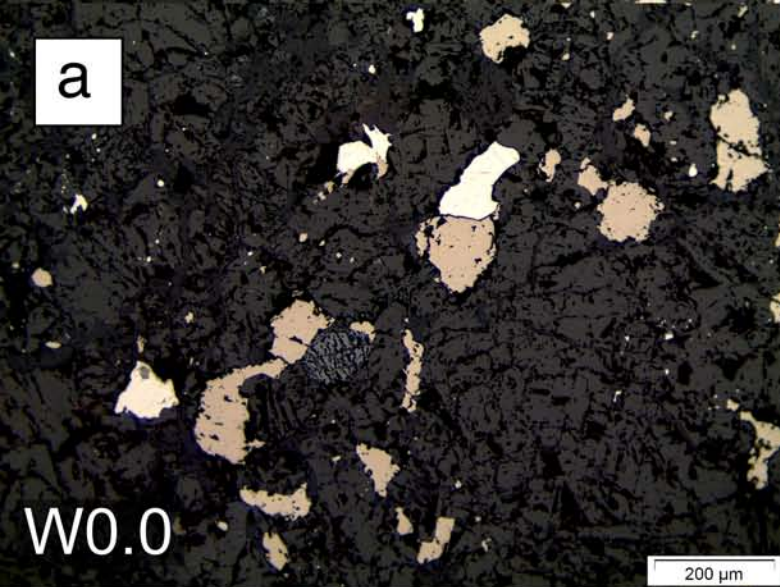
Fig. S2. Age distribution of a) all Ramlat al Wahiba (RaW) meteorites and b) all LL chondrites found during our searches in Oman.

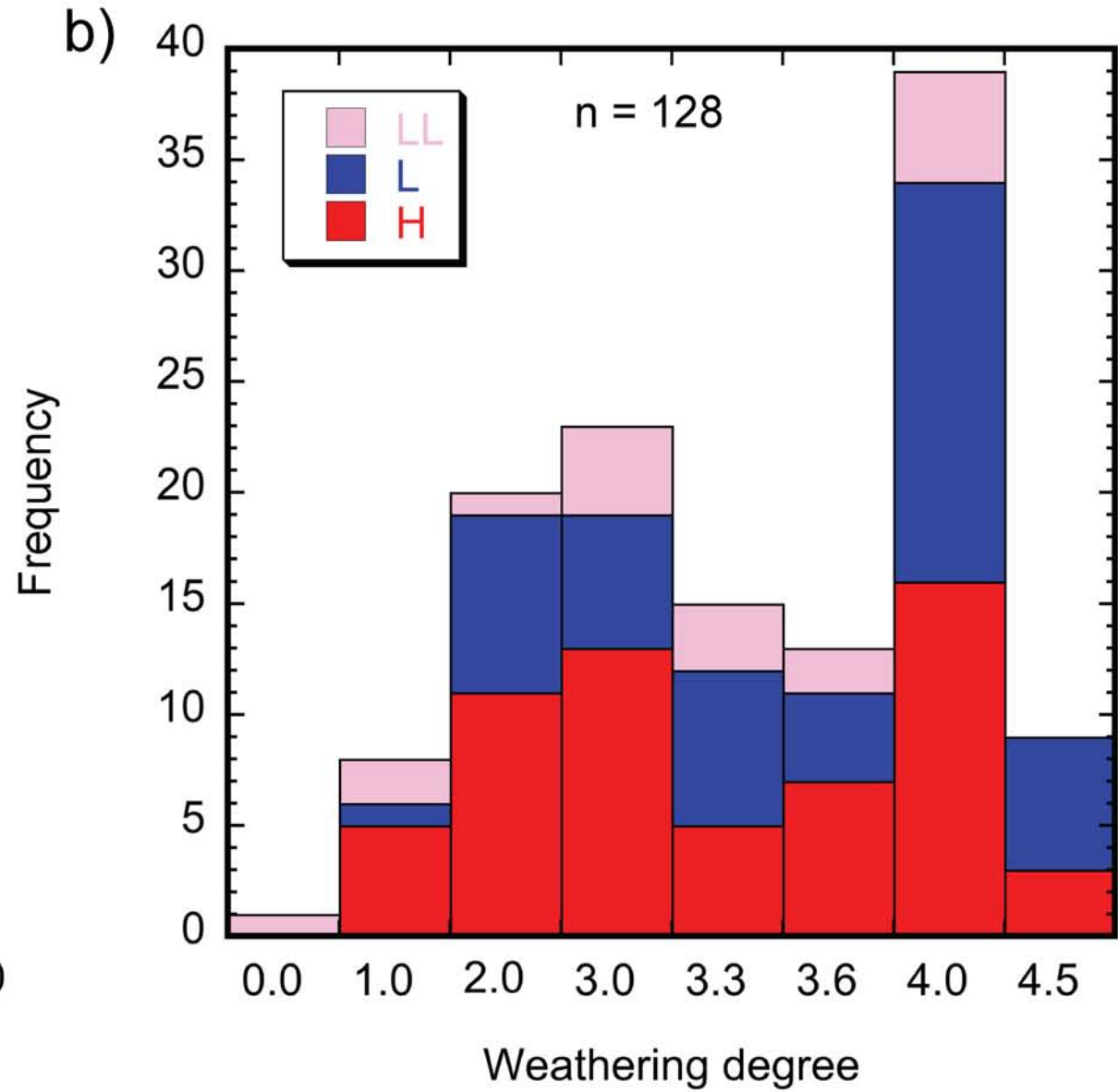
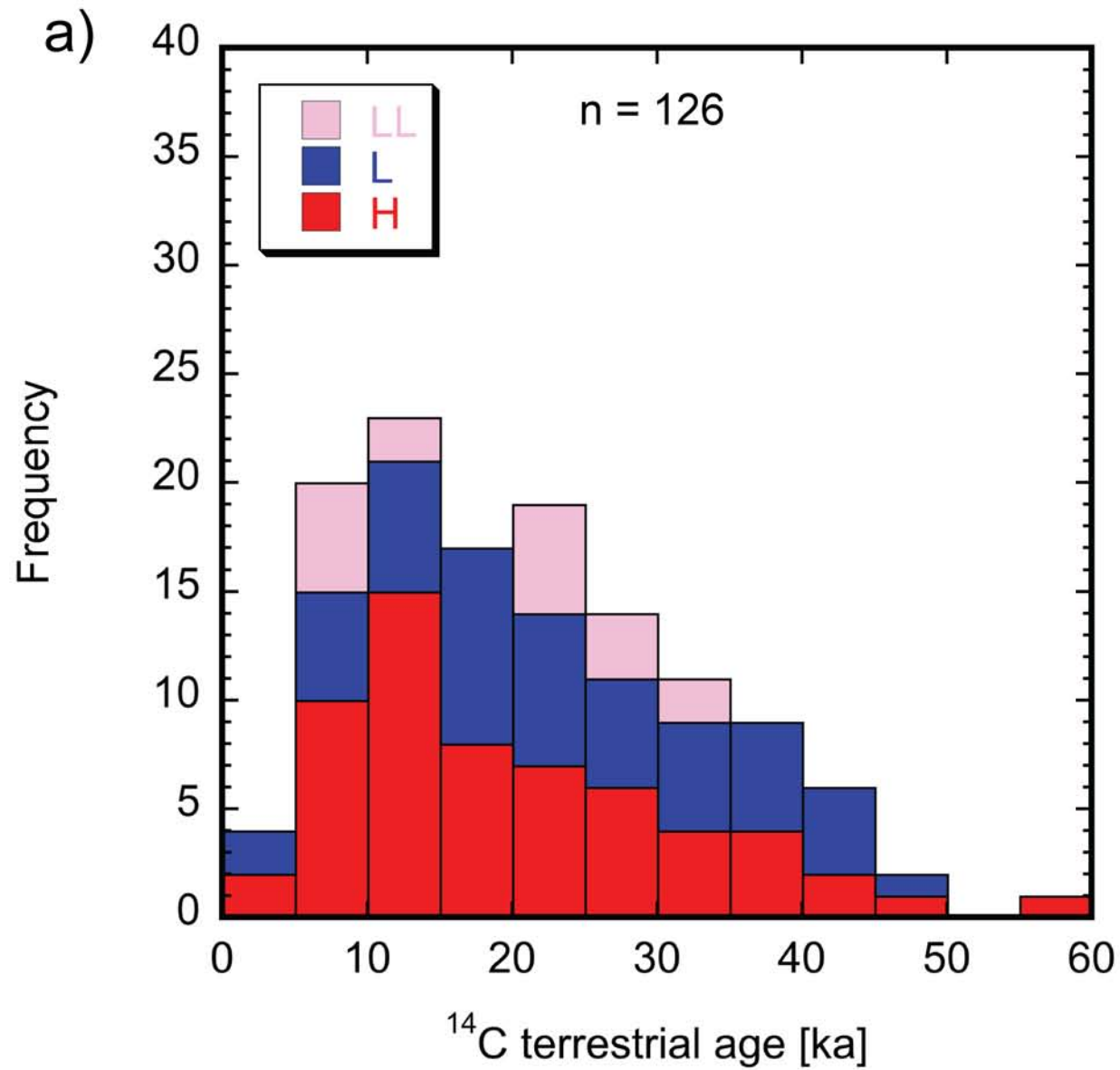
Table S1. Raw data, compilation of meteorite classification, chemical and macroscopic parameters, terrestrial ages

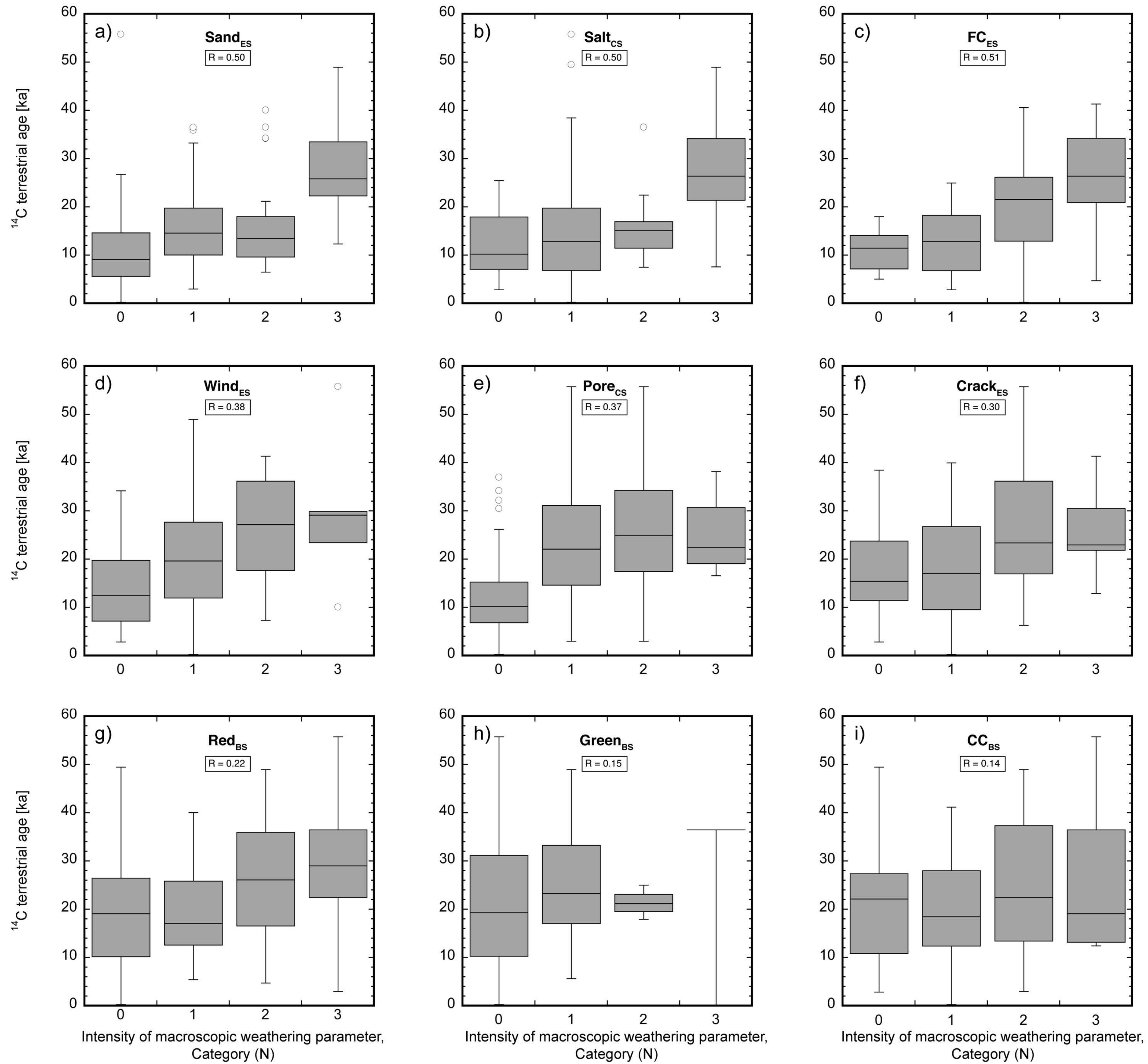
Table S2. Correlation matrix

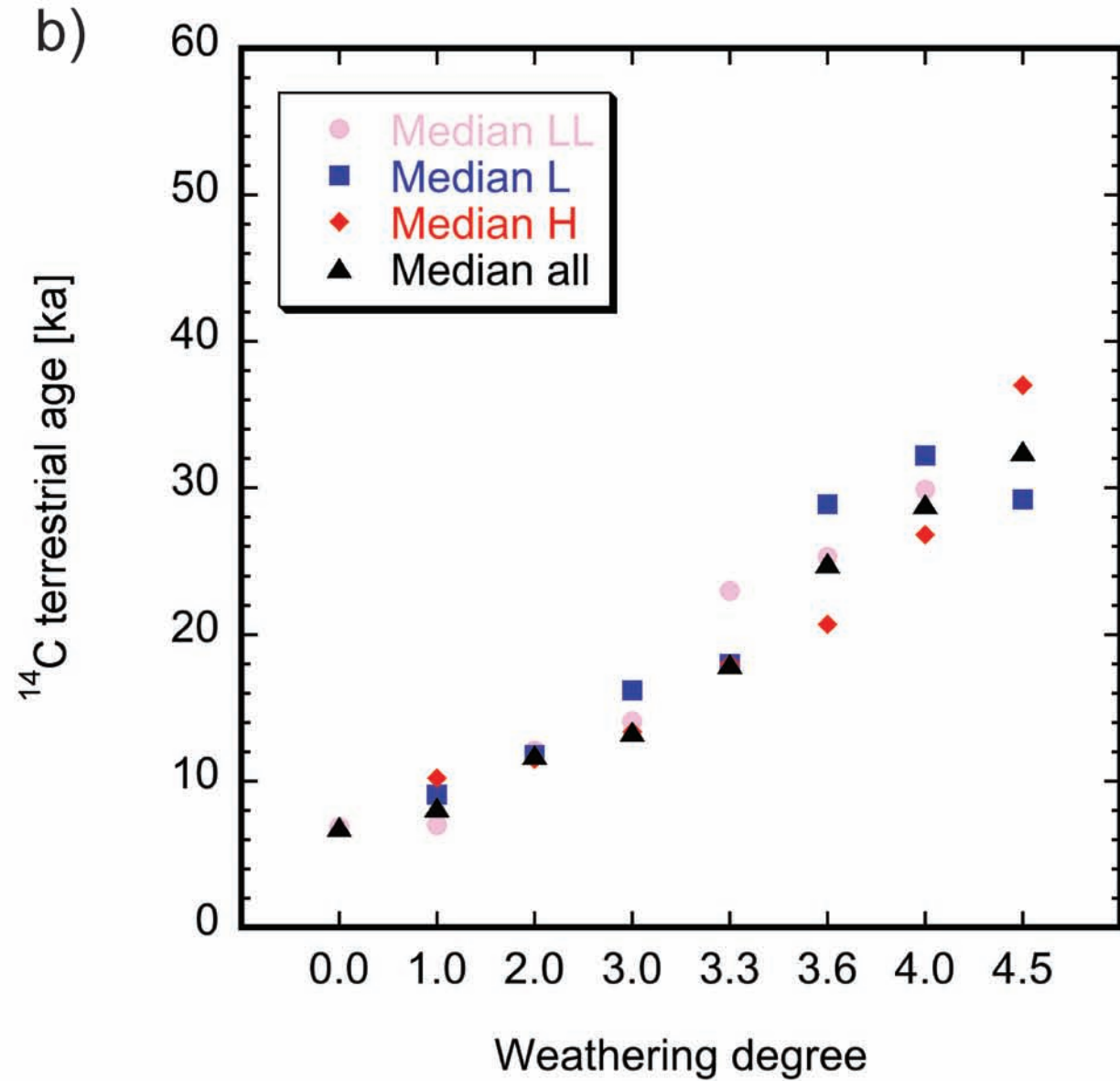
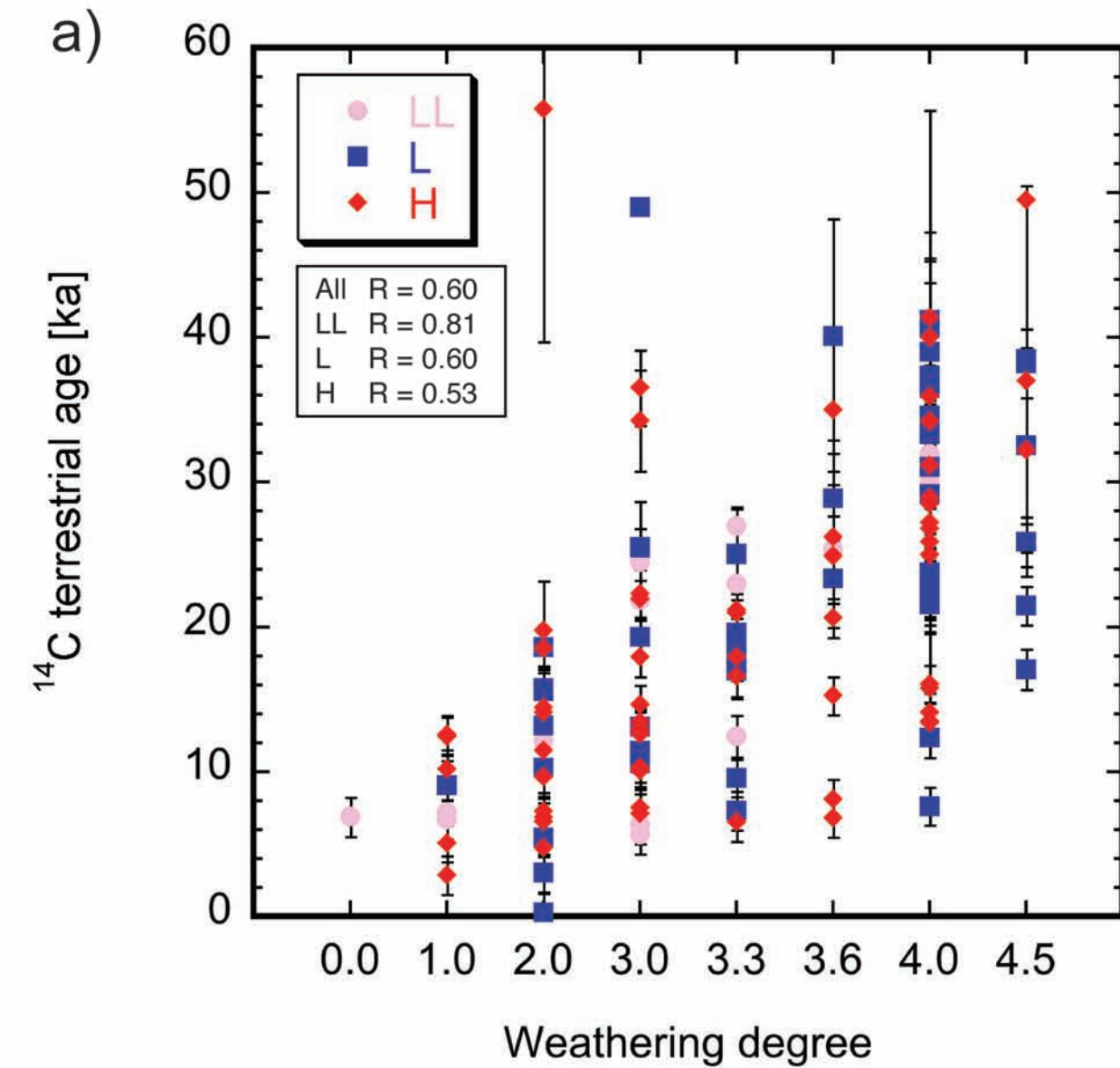


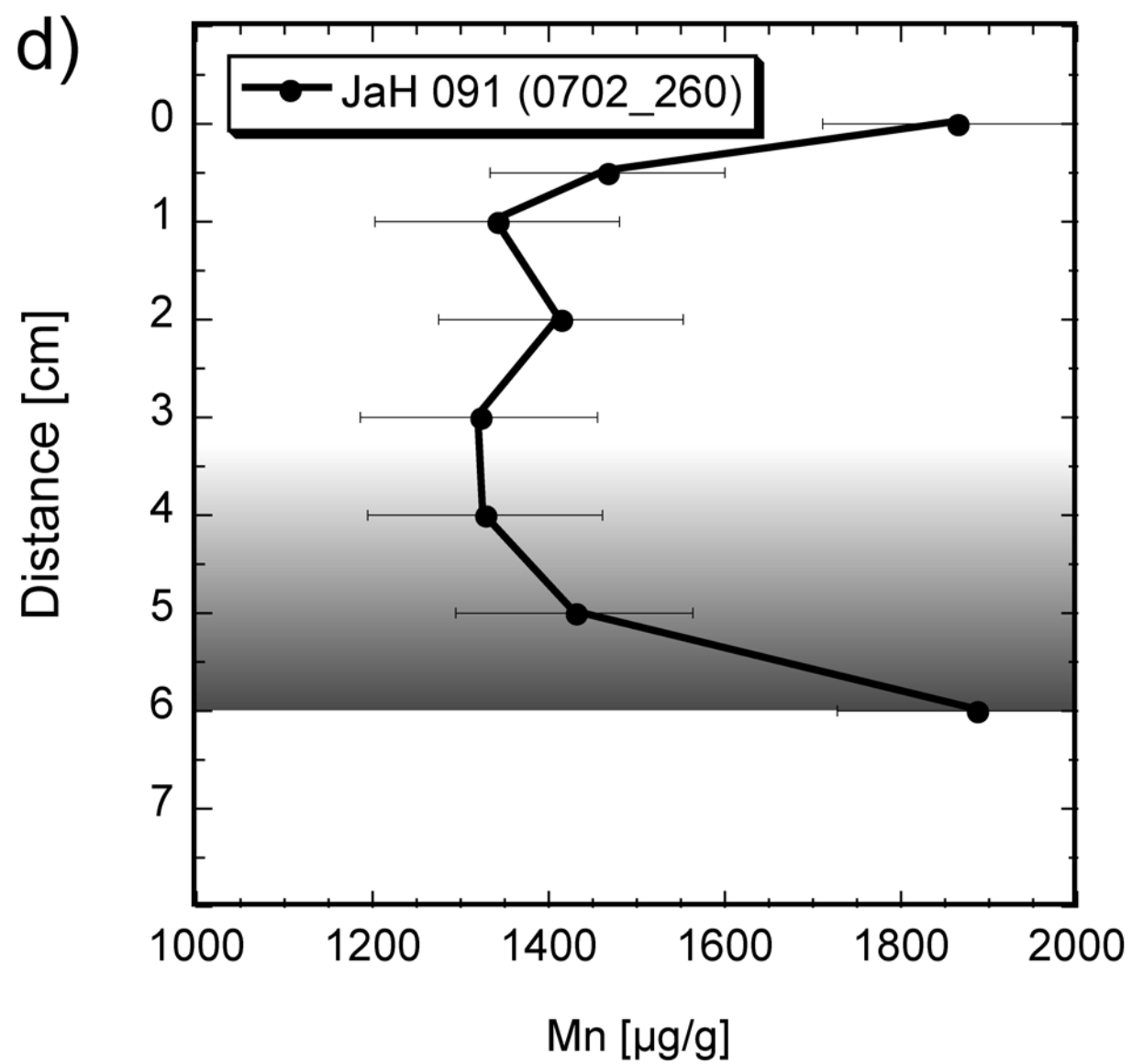
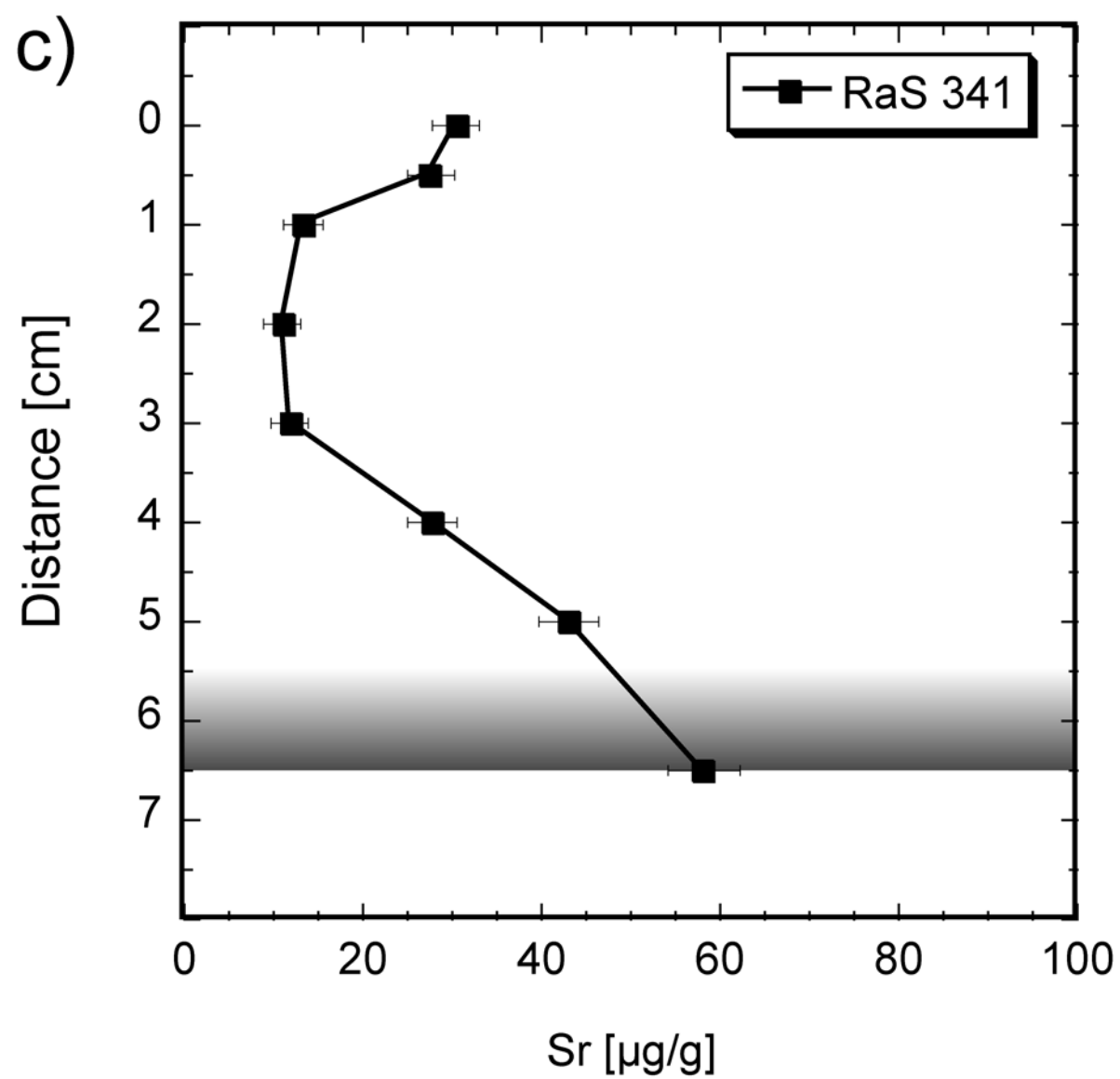
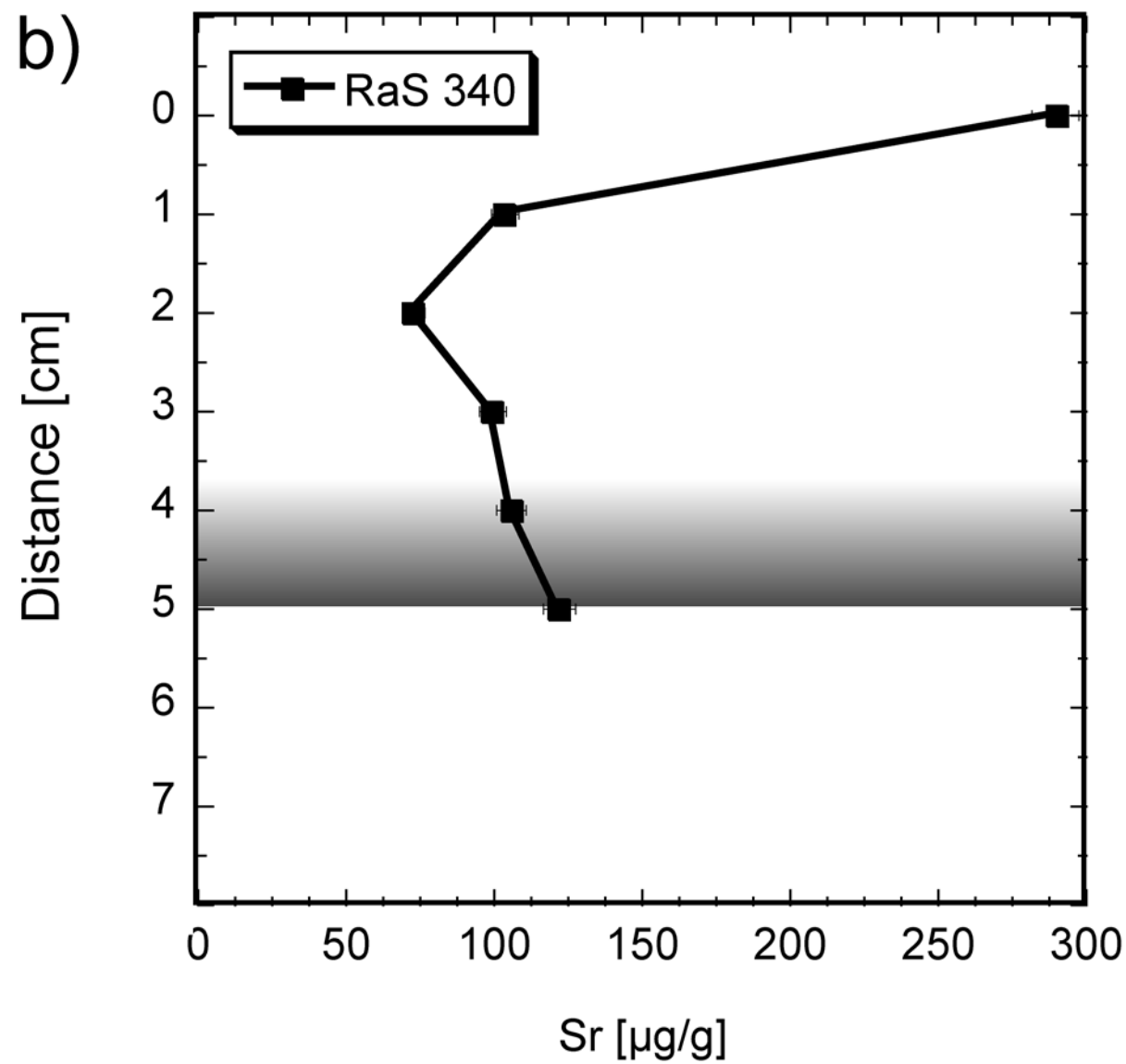
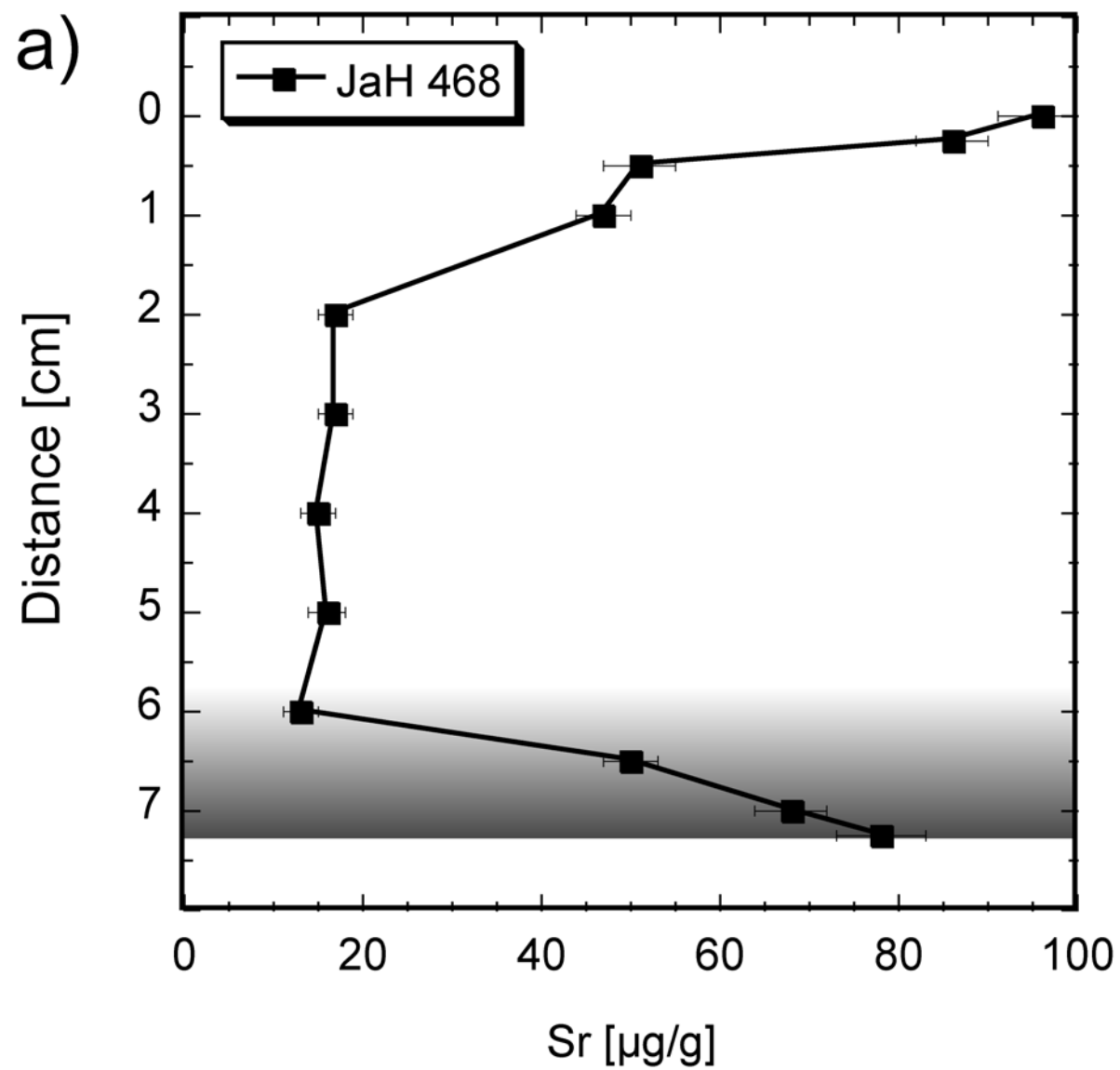


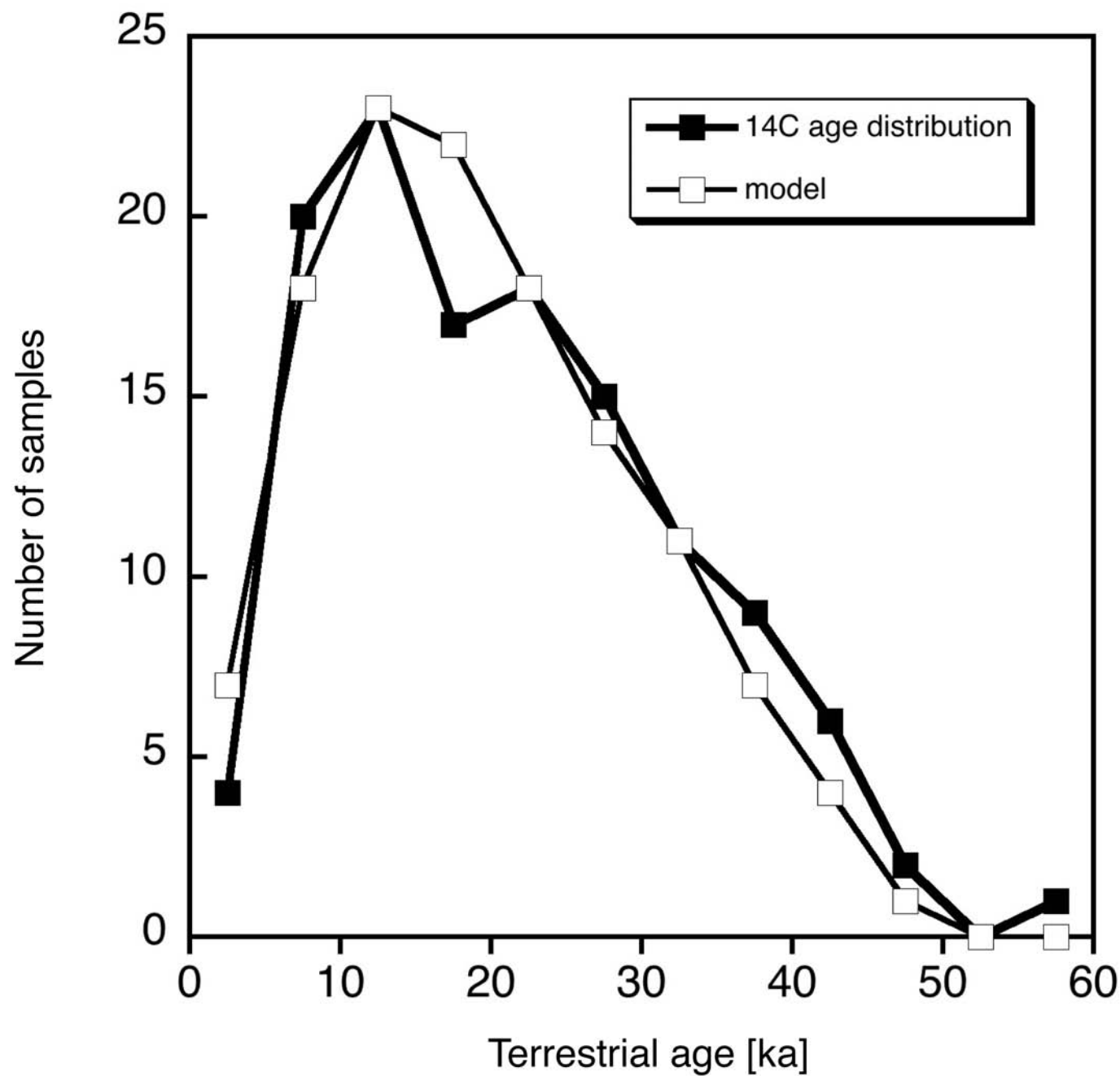


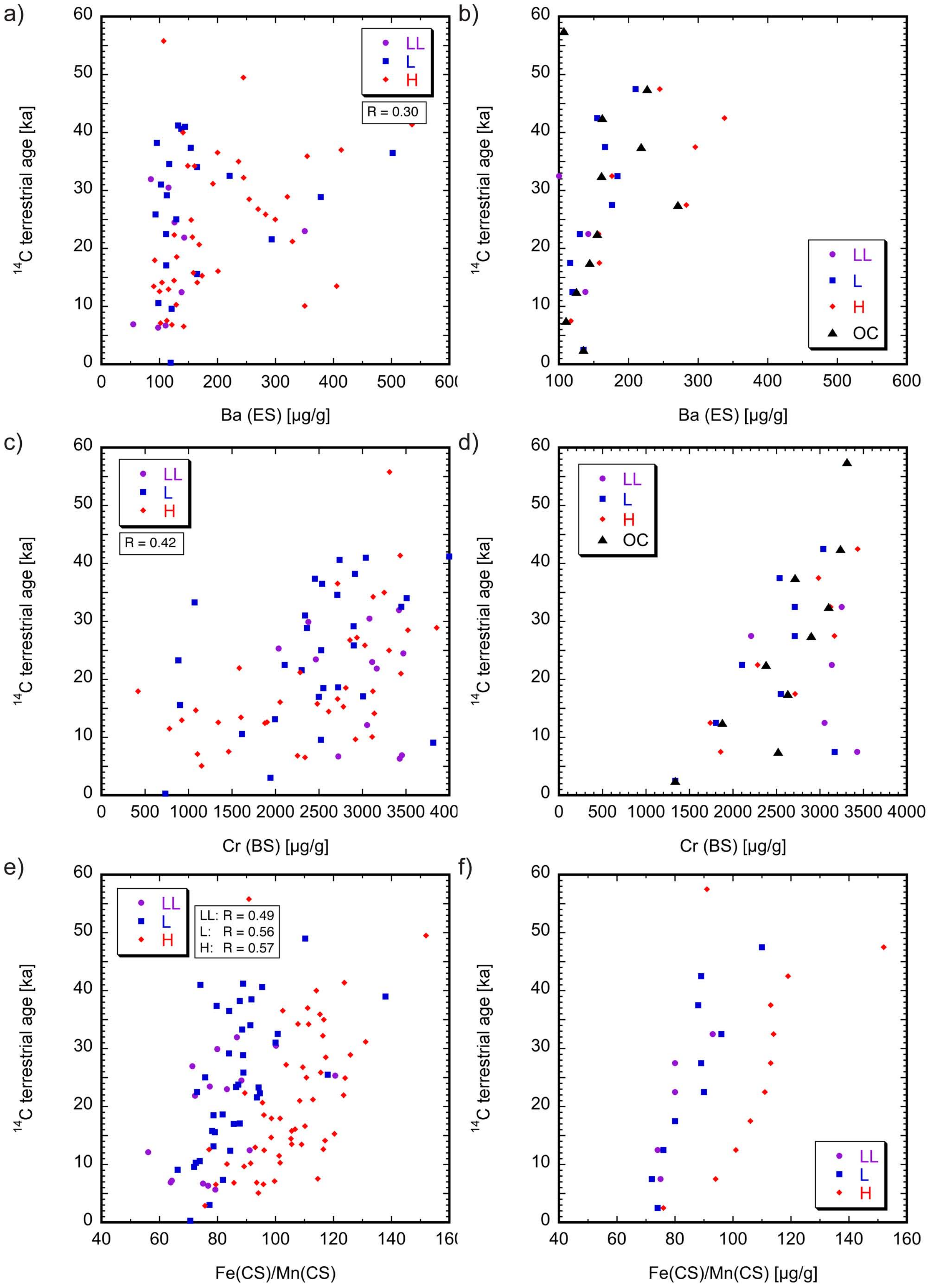


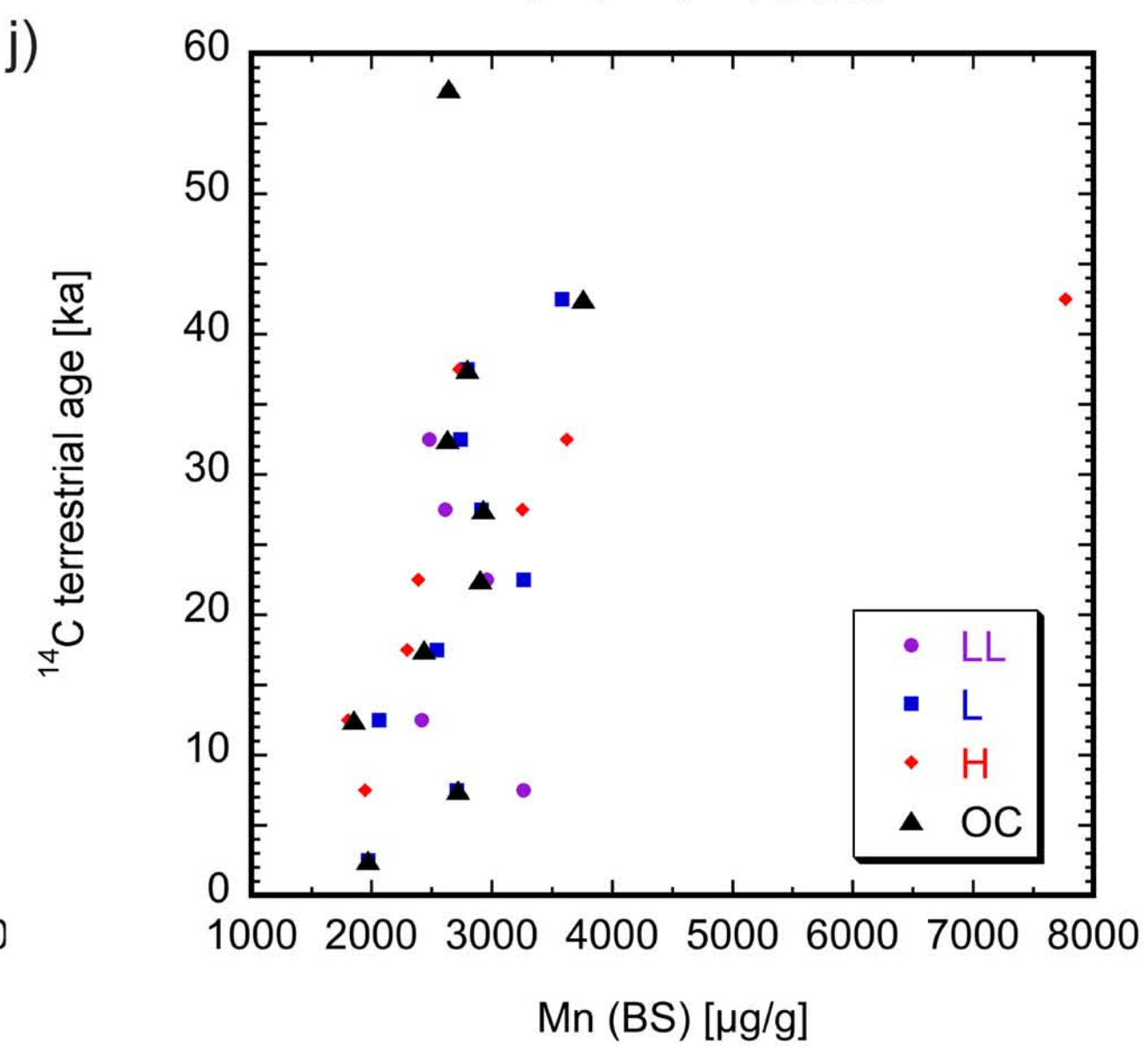
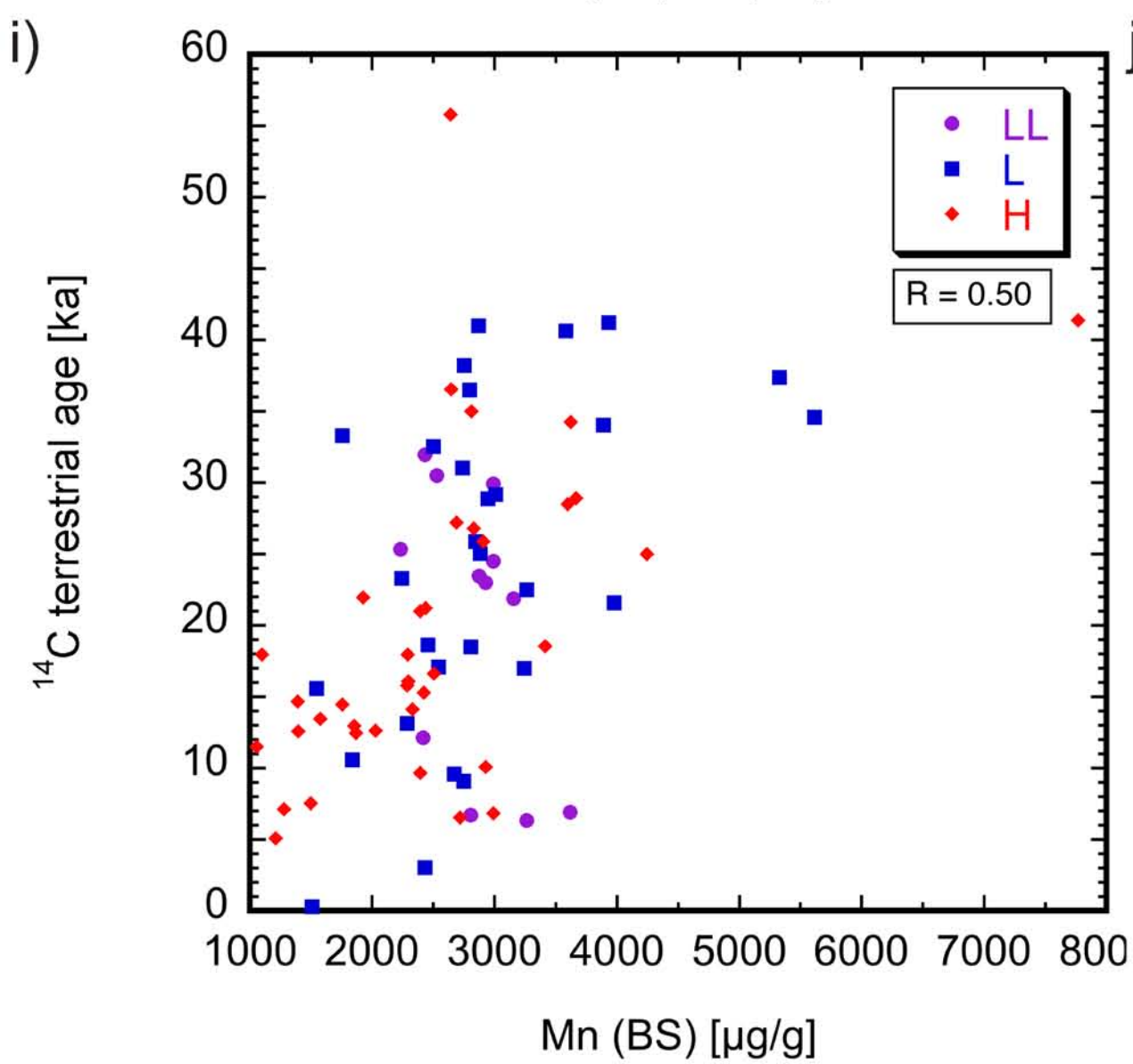
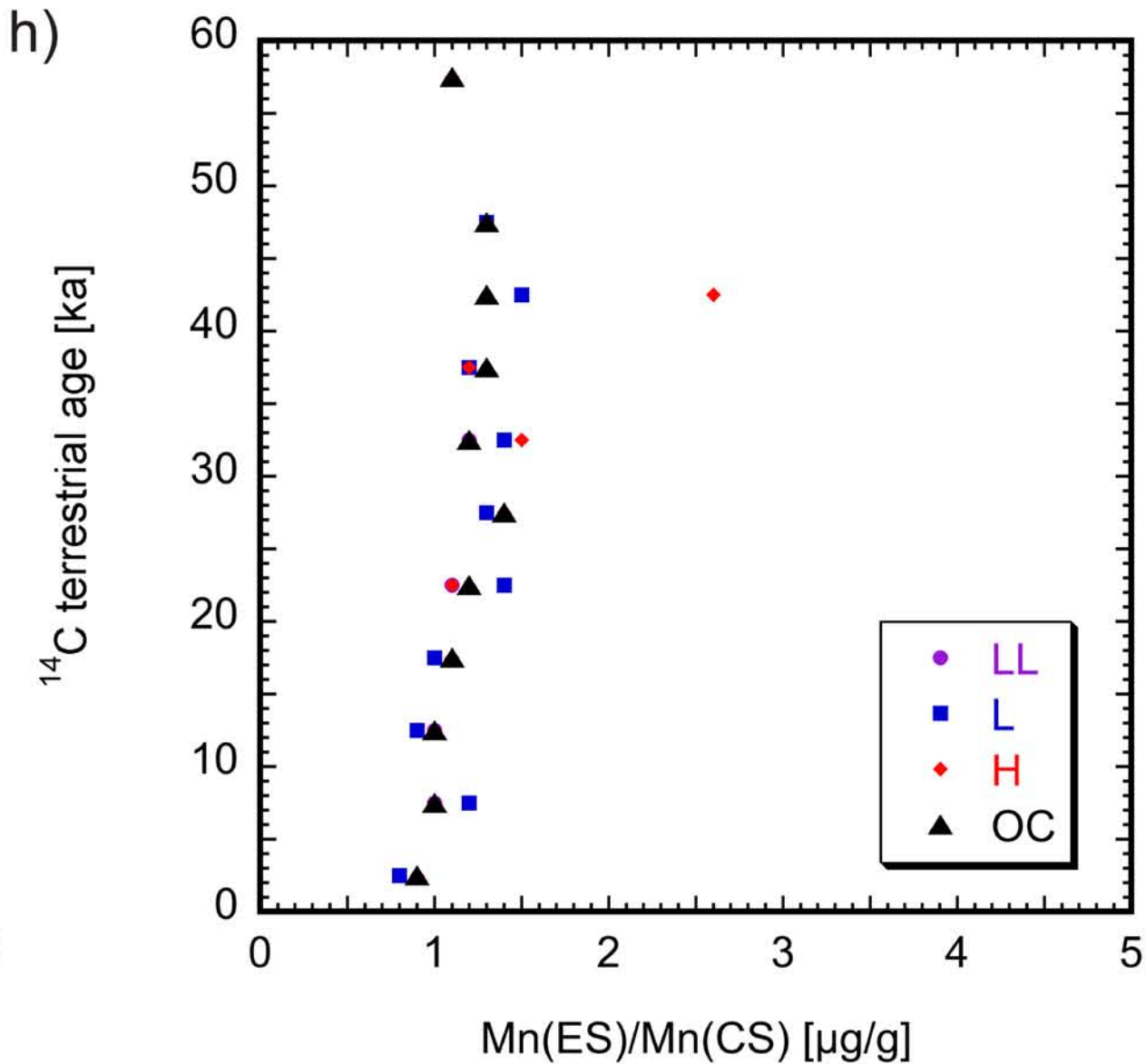
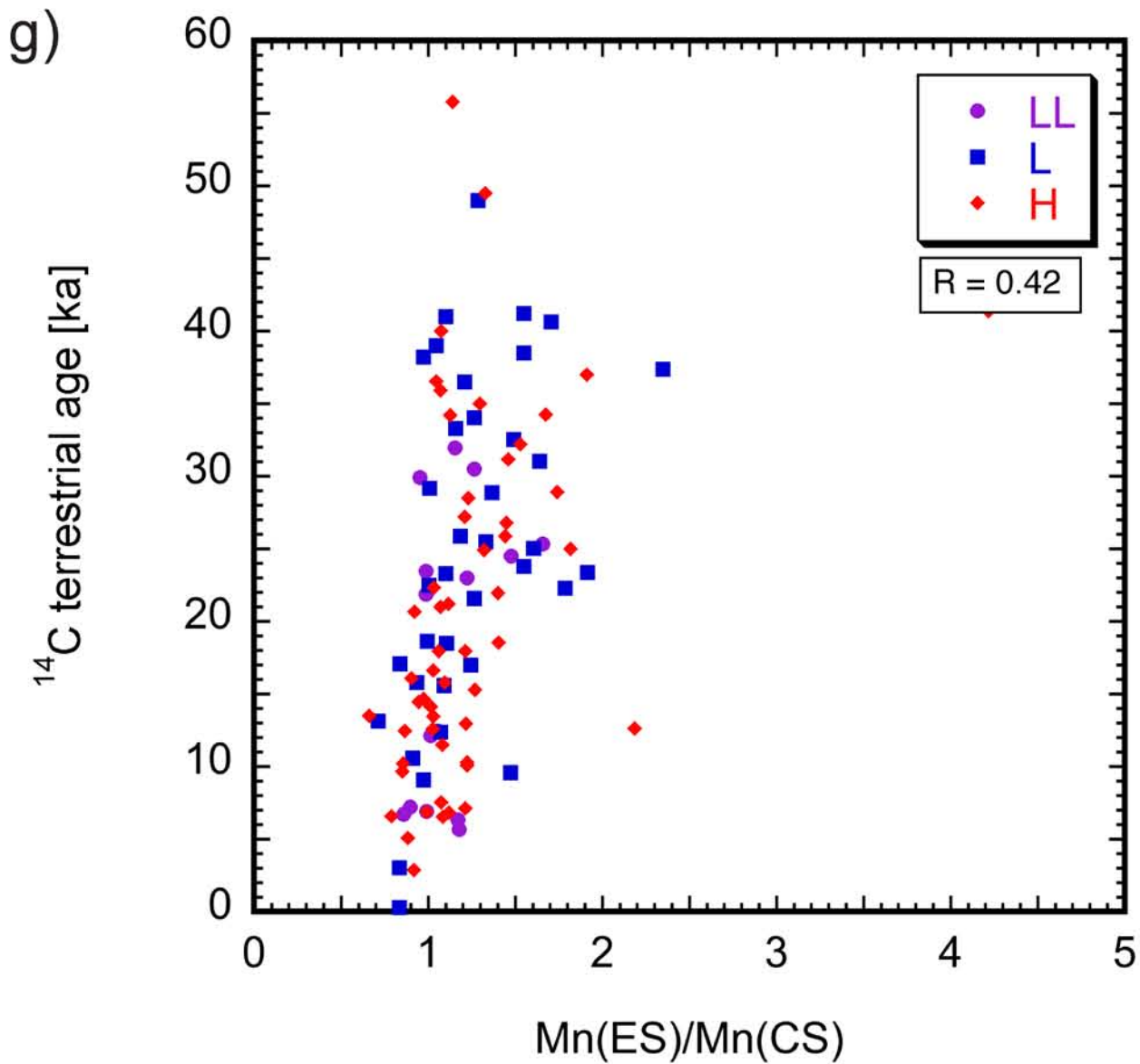


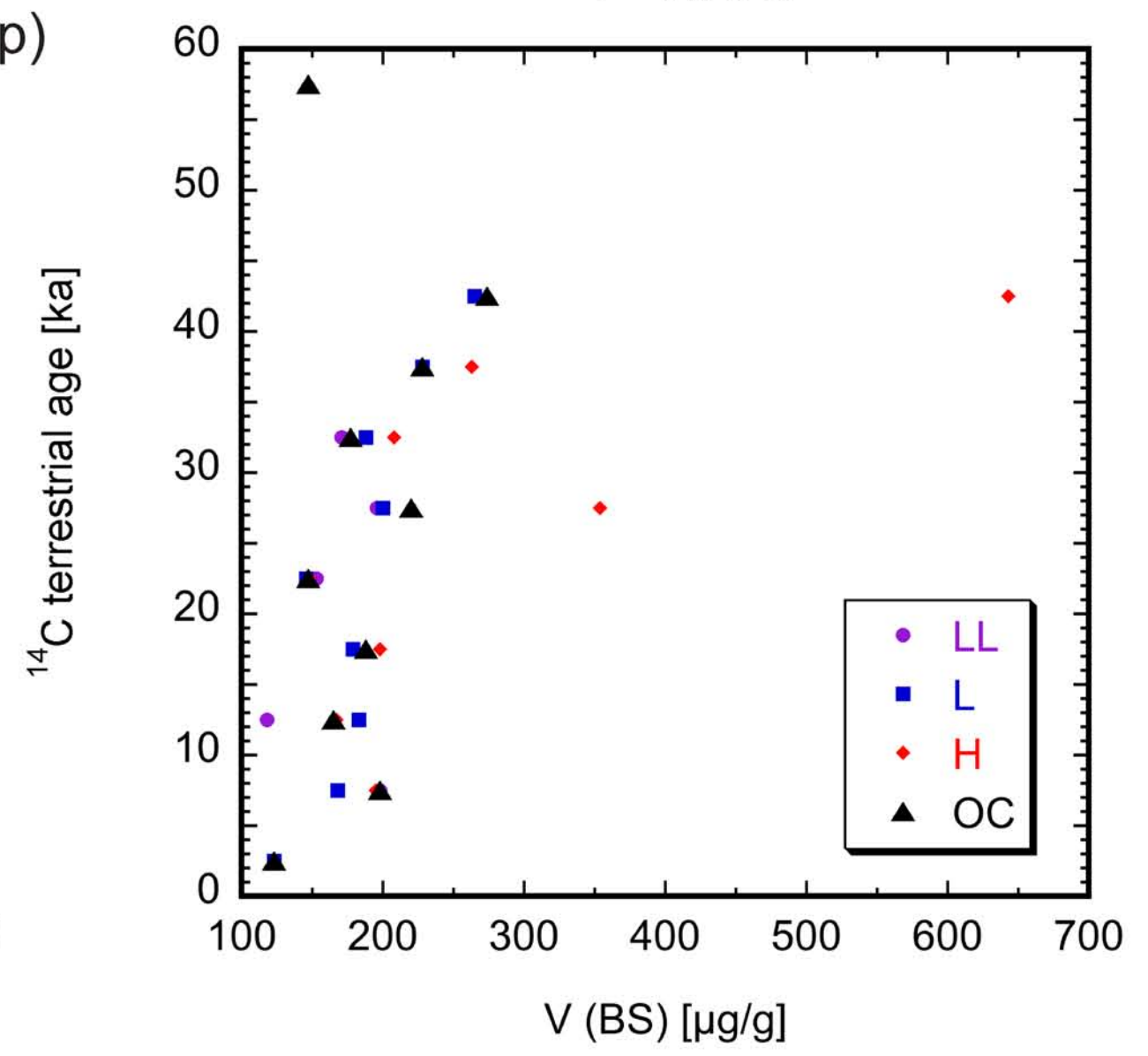
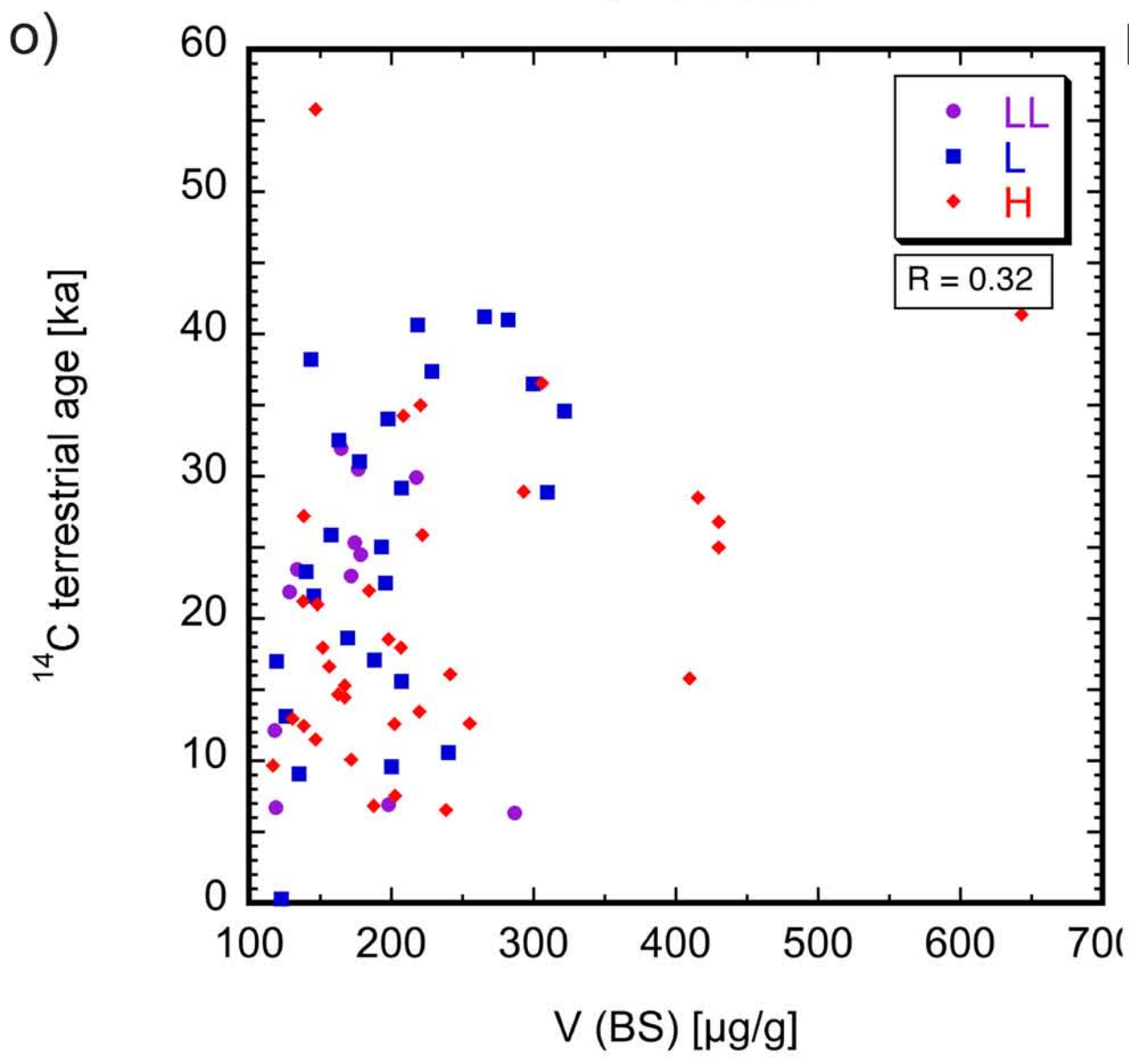
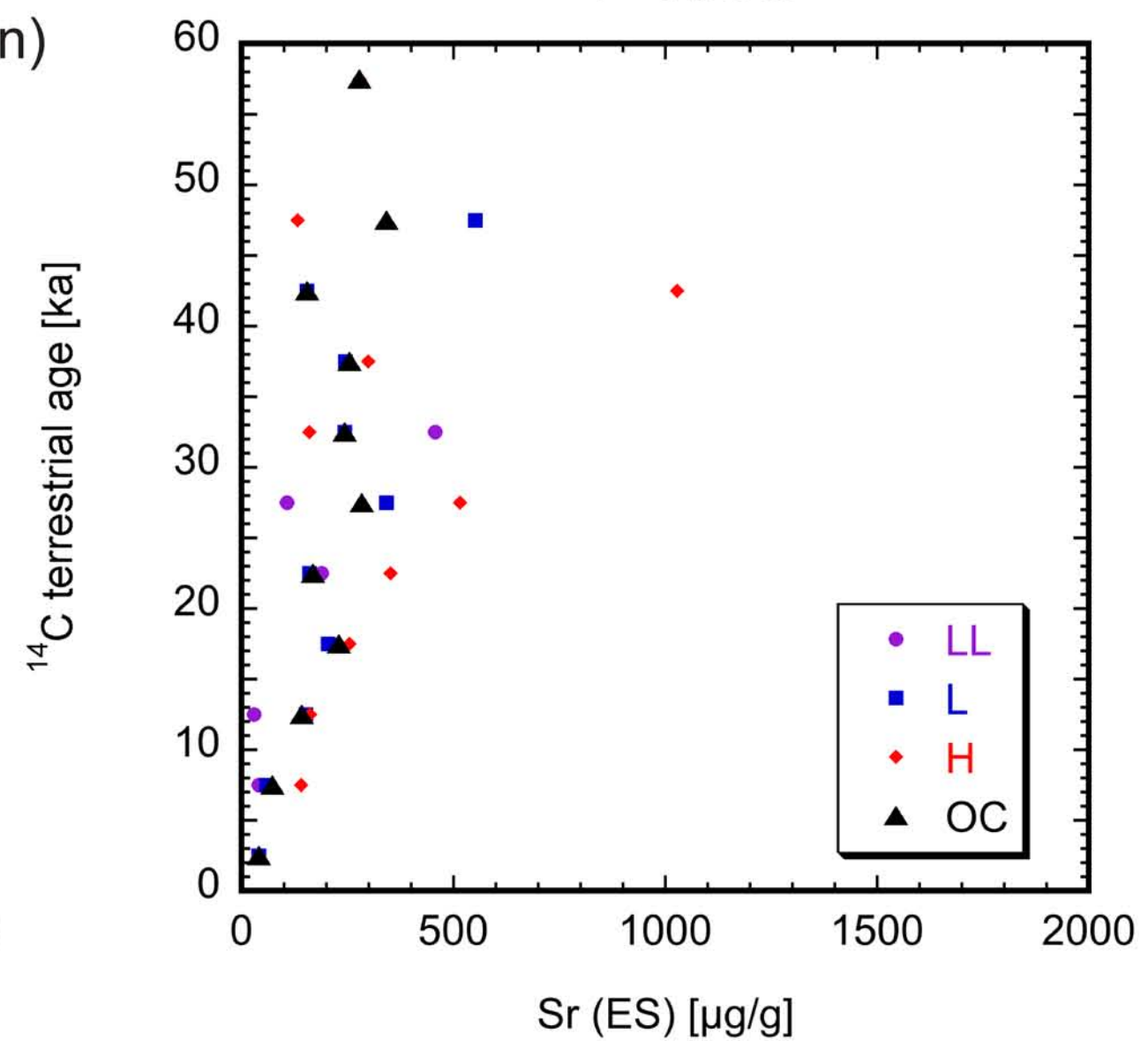
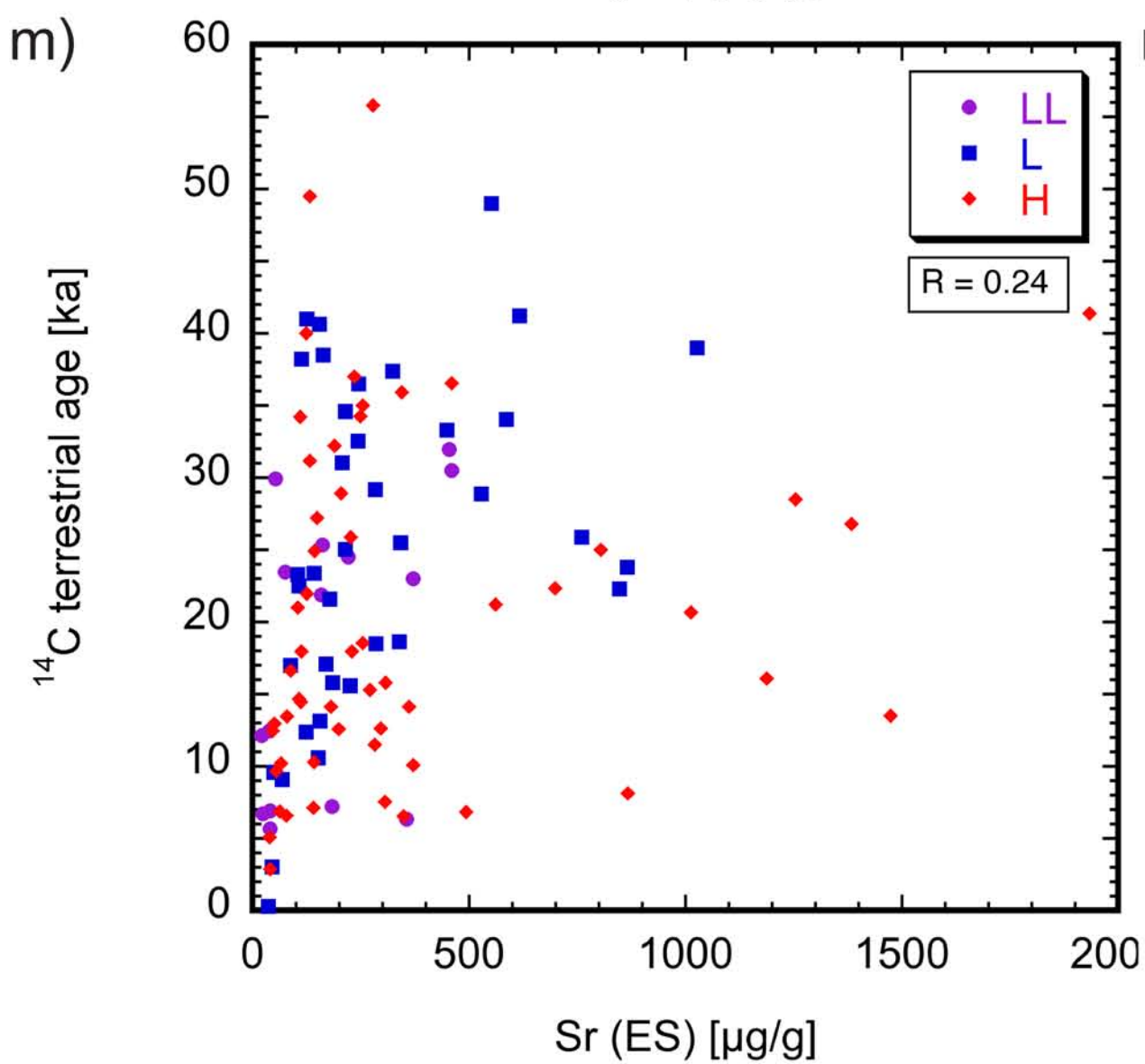
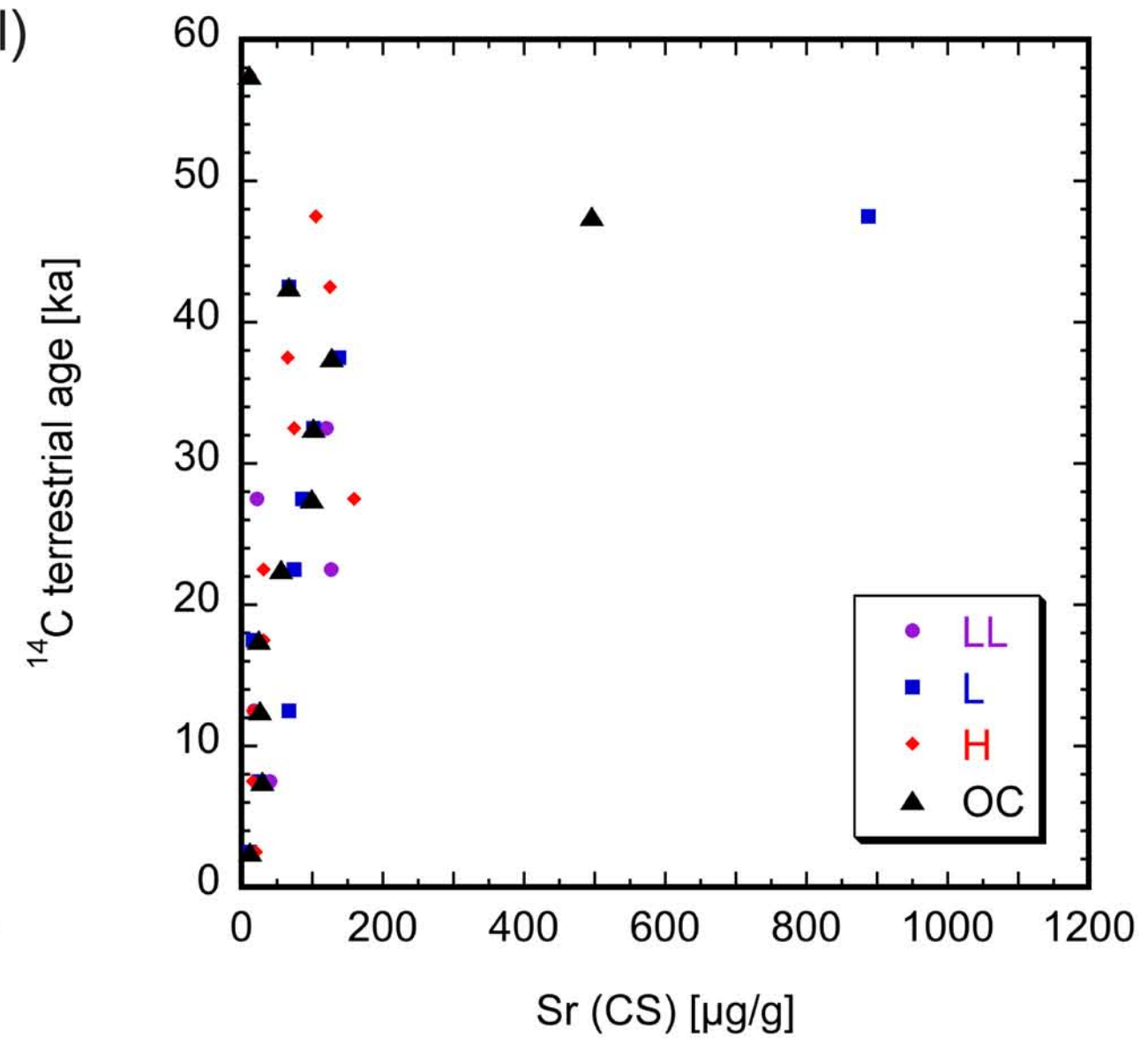
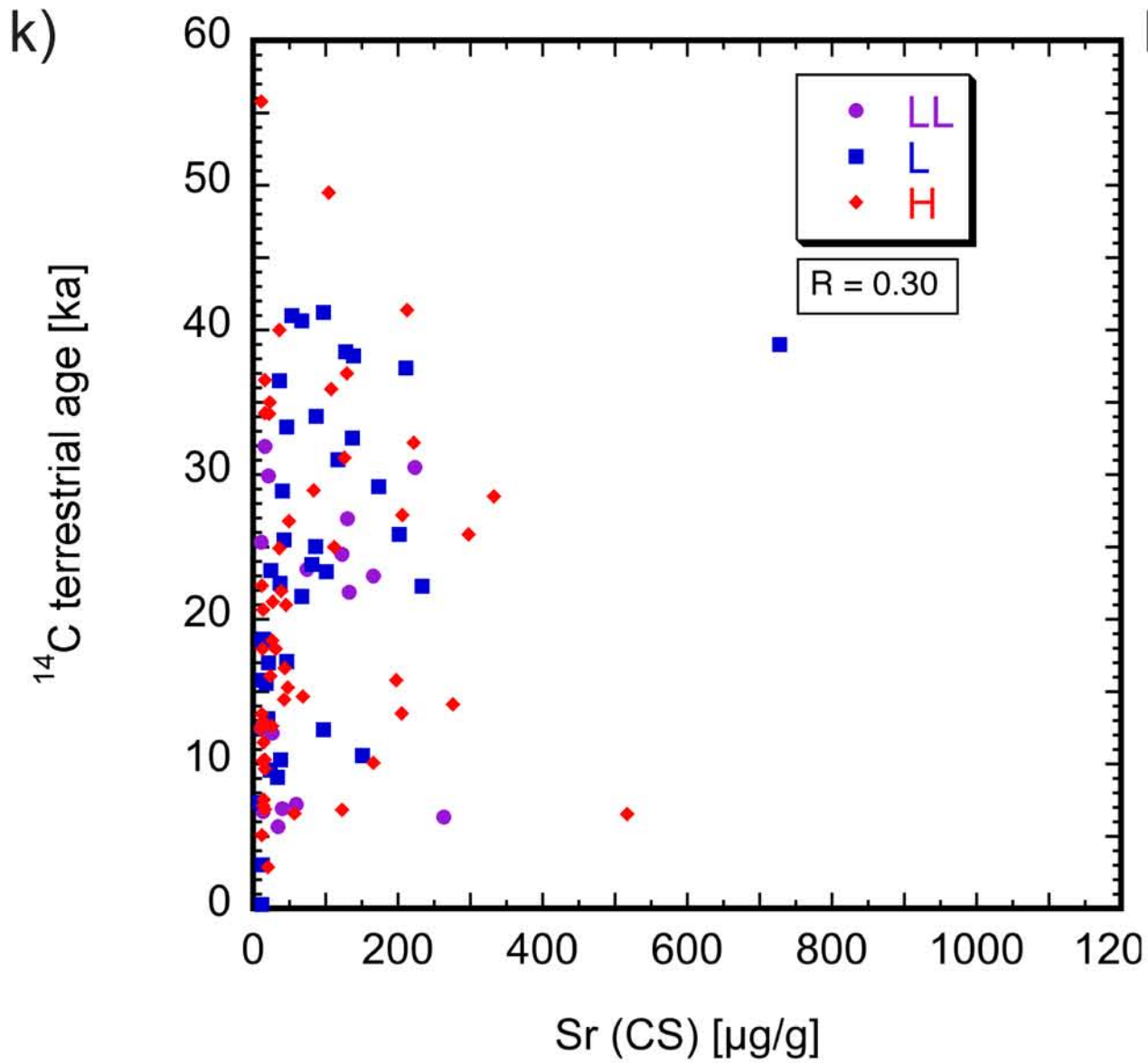












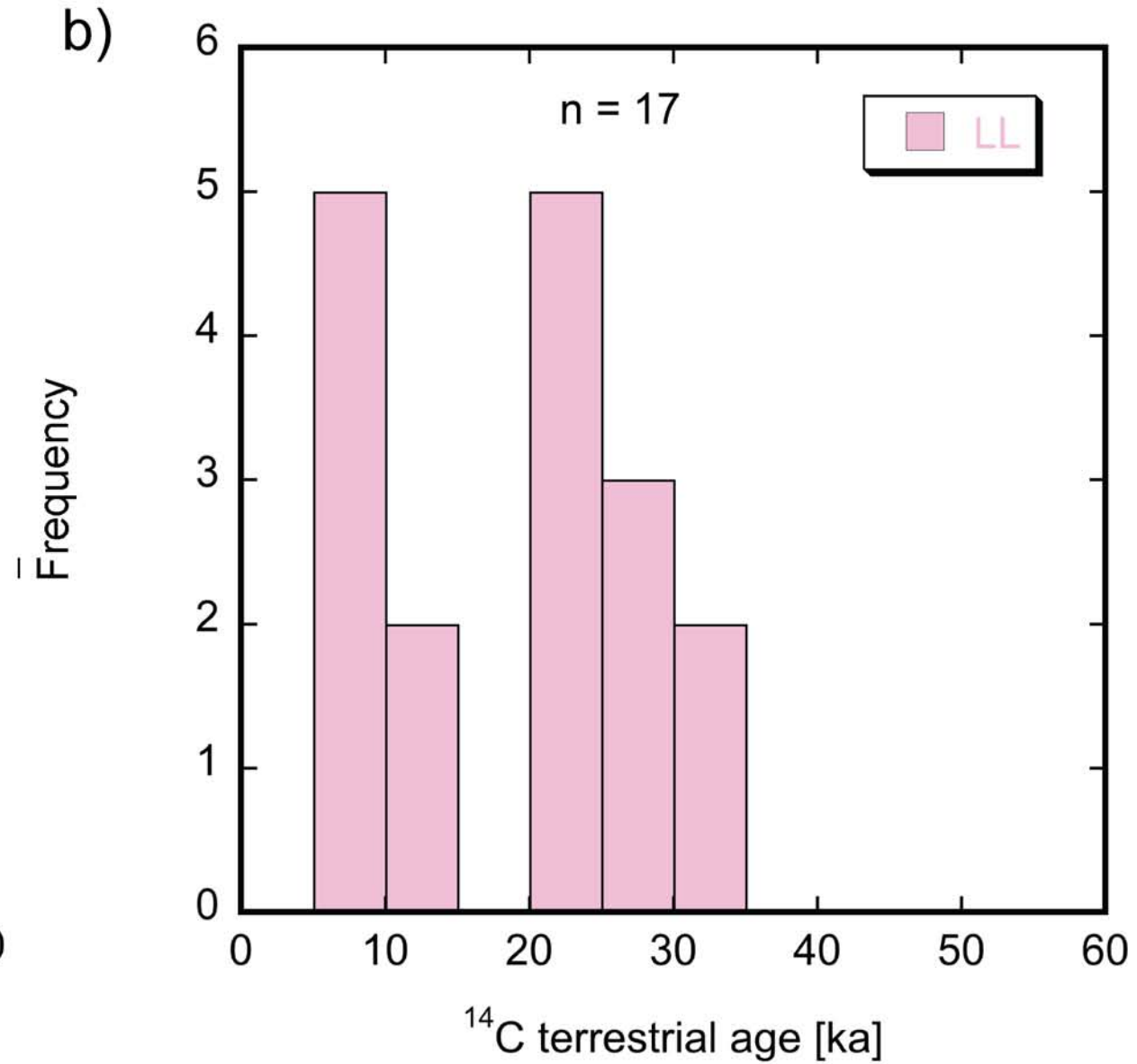
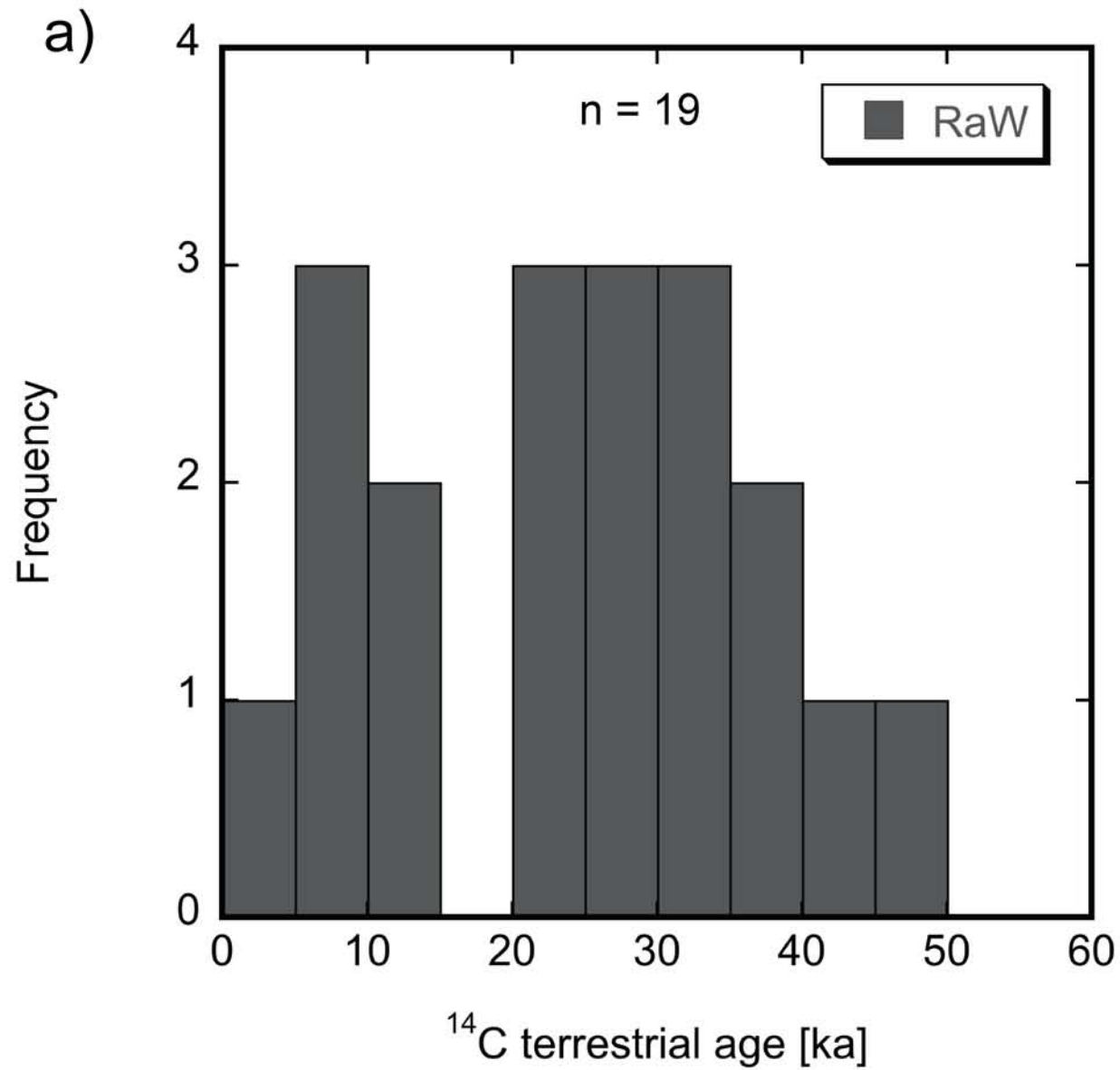


Table S1. Correlation matrix

	¹⁴ C age	Wind _{ES}	Sand _{ES}	FC _{ES}	Salt _{CS}	Pore _{CS}	Cracks _{ES}	White prec. _{BS}	Green _{BS}	Red _{BS}	WD	Ba _{ES}	Ba _{BS}	Fe _{CS} /Mn _{CS}	Fe _{ES} /Mn _{ES}	Mn _{ES} /Mn _{CS}	Mn _{BS}	Sr _{CS}	Sr _{BS}	Sr _{ES}	Sr _{ES} /Sr _{CS}
¹⁴ C age	1																				
Wind _{ES}	0.38	1																			
Sand _{ES}	0.50	0.26	1																		
FC _{ES}	0.51	0.57	0.49	1																	
Salt _{CS}	0.50	0.37	0.60	0.59	1																
Pore _{CS}	0.37	0.27	0.36	0.26	0.51	1															
Cracks _{ES}	0.30	0.28	0.21	0.28	0.30	0.37	1														
White prec. _{BS}	0.14	0.24	-0.11	0.01	0.05	0.27	0.26	1													
Green _{BS}	0.15	-0.02	0.05	-0.03	0.08	0.21	0.12	0.22	1												
Red _{BS}	0.22	0.20	0.06	0.05	0.18	0.28	0.26	0.43	0.28	1											
WD	0.60	0.35	0.61	0.62	0.66	0.41	0.34	-0.03	0.14	0.09	1										
Ba _{ES}	0.30	0.04	0.11	0.21	0.23	0.14	-0.04	-0.08	0.00	-0.21	0.38	1									
Ba _{BS}	0.29	-0.13	0.03	0.00	0.20	0.22	0.01	0.10	0.40	0.11	0.29	0.32	1								
Fe _{CS} /Mn _{CS}	0.41	0.09	0.21	0.34	0.31	0.16	0.12	-0.25	-0.06	-0.23	0.40	0.29	0.26	1							
Fe _{ES} /Mn _{ES}	-0.25	-0.08	-0.10	-0.03	-0.09	-0.07	-0.03	-0.11	0.05	-0.12	-0.11	0.02	-0.13	0.25	1						
Mn _{ES} /Mn _{CS}	0.42	0.09	0.25	0.20	0.24	0.14	0.16	0.07	-0.07	-0.04	0.34	0.38	0.25	0.31	-0.61	1					
Mn _{BS}	0.50	0.17	0.33	0.21	0.36	0.27	0.38	0.23	-0.14	0.12	0.41	0.29	0.13	0.04	-0.62	0.71	1				
Sr _{CS}	0.30	0.10	0.27	0.24	0.30	0.16	0.25	0.10	-0.02	0.01	0.29	0.10	0.04	0.24	-0.05	0.14	0.37	1			
Sr _{BS}	0.14	-0.03	-0.02	0.04	0.00	0.04	0.05	0.06	-0.18	-0.21	0.07	0.09	0.11	0.25	-0.13	0.32	0.19	0.22	1		
Sr _{ES}	0.24	0.14	0.21	0.17	0.26	0.28	0.18	0.07	-0.03	-0.09	0.36	0.34	0.19	0.30	0.05	0.38	0.49	0.36	0.58	1	
Sr _{ES} /Sr _{CS}	0.04	0.03	0.08	-0.01	-0.07	0.03	-0.16	0.03	-0.12	-0.08	-0.07	-0.08	0.03	0.05	0.14	-0.07	-0.13	-0.27	0.34	0.41	1